MARCH 2014
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126 PRODUCTS REVIEWED!

choice

TESTS

- Pressure cleaners
- Universal remotes
- Tablets
- Fitness watches
- Irons
- Smartphones
- Induction cooktops
- Fridges
- Dishwashers
- Dryers

EXTRA! EXTRA!
Make the most of health insurance

GRAPE EXPECTATIONS
The chemicals in your fruit

VOLUNTOURISM
Do they really need your help?

BREAKING FAD

Why is coconut oil so hot right now?

Star trekkin'

The fight over effective food labelling is too important to lose

The recent fallout over the decision to take down a food labelling website demonstrates just how important it is to have an independent consumer voice like CHOICE.

When we survey consumers about the issues that count, food labelling is always near the top of the list. This comes as no surprise – it can be difficult to work out how healthy (or otherwise) a food product is. The "daily intake guide" on the front of some products, with small symbols that tell you the percentage of recommended daily intake of things the product contains, such as salt, is highly misleading. It suggests we aim for a target intake of salt when the best dietary advice is that we should eat as little as possible.

The nutrition information panel on the back of products is something most of us don't have time to read while trying to do the weekly shop. To make it easier for everyone, we've been working hard behind the scenes to develop a new system. Our former Chair, Jenni Mack, and Campaigns Manager, Angela Cartwright, have spent countless hours over the past few years locked up in meetings with government, health and industry representatives.

We've had to be willing to compromise along the way, including sacrificing our commitment to our preferred traffic light rating system in favour of the proposed new system, which would give a food product an overall star rating, from one to five stars.

Despite these compromises, we felt the system we came up with was worth it – a simple way of signalling the overall nutritional value of food, on the front of packs. More than 6000 people agreed when they signed up to our joint petition with the Cancer Council, as part of our "Be a Star" campaign.

Sadly, this turned into a political hot potato with the controversial decision by federal Assistant Health Minister, Fiona Nash, to take down the website promoting the new system.

Food labelling shouldn't be a party-political issue. This is, rather, an issue that lines consumers up against some of the biggest food companies in the world – the multinationals behind brands such as Kellogg, Cadbury and Kraft. Opportunities like this – to change the way food is packaged and marketed – only come along once a decade, and this fight is too important to lose.

We'll be campaigning hard over the coming months to save the new system and make health star ratings available to consumers – and we'll be looking to you for support.

Log on to **choice.com.au/beastar** to find out more and to sign up as a supporter of our healthy star ratings campaign.

Alan Kirkland, CEO
Email: alan@choice.com.au
Twitter: @AlanKirkland

For general membership & consumer enquiries, phone 1800 069 552

CHOICE

CHOICE gives you the power to choose the best goods and services, and avoid the worst. We pay full price for the products we test, so remain 100% independent. We don't take advertising or freebies from industry. We're not a government body and our consumer publishing and advocacy is almost entirely funded by subscriptions to our magazines, **choice.com.au** and from other services we supply to benefit members and consumers. CHOICE product ratings are based on lab tests, expert assessments and consumer surveys. CHOICE staff also research a wide range of consumer services. They reveal the truth behind the facts and figures, and investigate the quality and the claims. **SUBSCRIBE** To review the full range of membership benefits available to you, go to **choice.com.au/signup** and compare all our options for providing you access to our premium content across our website, mobile, tablet and print products. **SUBSCRIPTIONS/RENEWALS** Call 1800 069 552 or email us at **ausconsumer@choice.com.au**

PEFC

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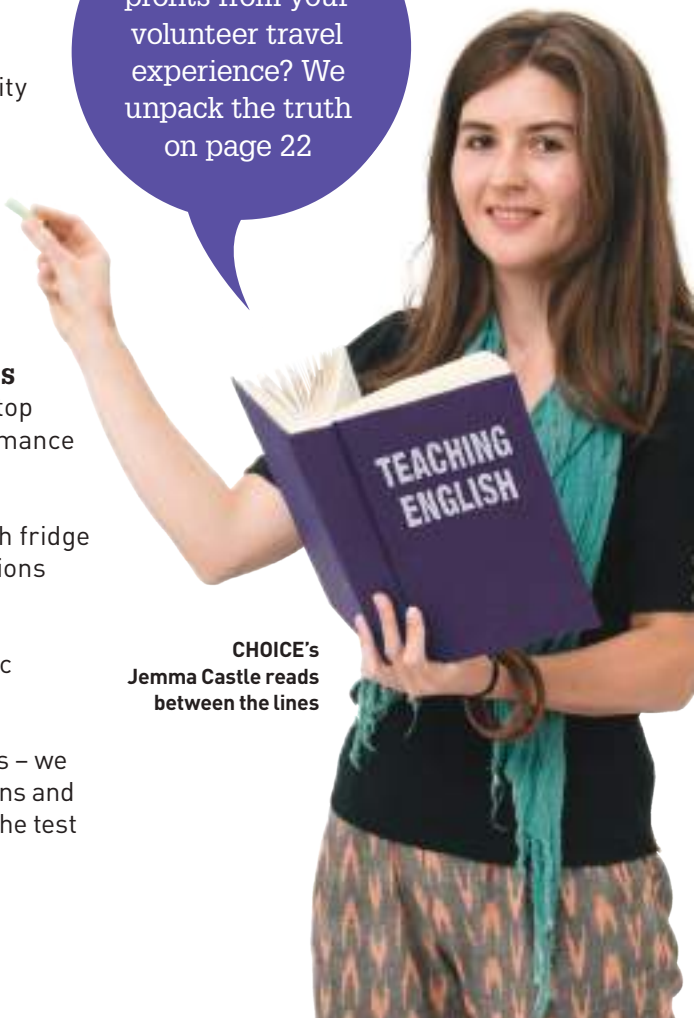


CHOICE's Jemma Castle reads between the lines

Dairy for diabetes

New research has found consuming four-and-a-half 125g pots of yoghurt per week can reduce the risk of new-onset type 2 diabetes by 28%, when compared with no yoghurt consumption at all. In fact, the study, which followed the eating habits of 25,000 men and women, indicated that higher consumption of low-fat fermented dairy products – including some low-fat cheeses such as cottage cheese and fromage frais – also reduced the relative risk of diabetes by 24% overall.

But while the news is good for low-fat dairy lovers, it's not quite as sunny as it may seem. "We cannot be certain that the yoghurt actually caused the reduction in diabetes risk," says associate professor Richard O'Brien, clinical dean of medicine at the Austin Clinical School, University of Melbourne and senior endocrinologist at Austin Hospital. "The yoghurt eaters tended to be slimmer, more physically active and smoke and drink less. Thus they were a more healthy group overall.

"The investigators used sophisticated computer modelling to try to control for all of those other factors but this is always difficult".

ZOYA SHEFTALOVICH

➤ I SAY

What's (not) in a name?

Dealing with bureaucracy has never been a fun (or particularly productive) pastime. And it's complicated further still when trying to deal with Australian bureaucracy with regard to a uniquely foreign problem. Enter the Department of Births, Deaths &Marriages.

I recently married my Danish partner. As is the local custom, he has two last names. I decided to change my name, but not wanting to have the double-barrel, chose to take just one. Our honeymoon was a few months away and I had a passport with plenty of blank pages and lots of time left on it, but it didn't match my new name.

Under Australian law, a new passport can be issued free of charge to those who take on a married name. I rang the department to check I was eligible, and they told me that taking just one of the two names would be no problem. I checked the passports.gov.au website, which also indicated I was well within my rights. When I

Under Australian law, a new passport can be issued free of charge to those who take on a married name. But I was told I owed almost $300

BREAKING NEWS

All's fair

The review of copyright law released last month by the Australian Law Reform Commission recommends "fair use". In a speech following the report's released, the Attorney-General said he was sceptical of fair use, but open to debate. He also flagged possible anti-piracy measures, which CHOICE considers to be draconian. We argue the best way to reduce piracy is to increase access to content through legitimate channels – see **choice.com.au/fairuse**

Now see here

A computer or iPad game designed to provide visual training via nerve stimulation can teach people to see better, US research has found. Baseball players taking part in a trial spent 25 minutes a day, four days a week for two months finding certain visual patterns in a computer game, which were progressively dimmed to exercise vision. In some cases, the system allowed the players to see three times the distance of a normal observer.

got to my local post office for my passport interview, during which my existing passport was chopped up, I was told that everything would be fine.

So you can imagine my surprise when, a couple of weeks later, I had a phone call from a department official. I was told I owed close to $300 because she was classifying my situation as a "name change" and not a "married name change".

I was shocked. I had taken one of my husband's surnames – it was hardly random or a whim! I questioned the decision, made phone calls, wrote a letter and generally wasted a significant portion of my life being tied up in red tape. A whole month after the sorry mess began, I finally received a definitive outcome. The agent rang me to say my free passport would be honoured – this time. She also said that the messaging on the website would be changed to be more consistent with their policy. But when I asked what that policy was, she couldn't answer.

And so the bureaucracy lives on.

JENNIFER KALSEN

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

Gluten screen

A significant improvement in coeliac disease diagnosis could be just around the corner, with Australian researchers discovering a DNA-based method that may be capable of more accurately predicting who will go on to develop coeliac disease (an inability to digest gluten). For more on health screening, see page 34.

The Checkout is back

Good news for consumer affairs fans – the critically acclaimed show *The Checkout* is back on our screens for another season.

The show, hosted by Julian Morrow, Craig Reucassel, Kirsten Drysdale and CHOICE's very own Kate Browne, returned to ABC1 in late February and will run in an extended season until early July.

With an expanded on-air team, the show promises to uncover the ways consumers are being taken advantage of – all with the help of CHOICE.

Having looked at issues such as funeral plans, super foods, the milk wars and extended warranties, this year the show will tackle taxi fees, superannuation and product labels and more, as well as regular segments such as *Product vs Packshot*, *As a Guilty Mum* and *If I Could Say One Thing*. Tune in to *The Checkout* – ABC1 8pm Thursdays.

Black marks

A new credit reporting privacy code coming into effect this month will allow banks and other lenders to collect and disclose more information about you to credit reporting agencies. This information includes late payments of consumer loans such as credit cards, mortgages and car loans.

The compulsory code gives guidelines to lenders and credit reporting agencies and has, for example, put in place a five-day-grace period after which a late payment can be listed on your credit report as a black mark.

For more information on the regime and how you can protect your credit report, keep an eye out for *CHOICE* Apr 14. **UTA MIHM**

Rise in apathy

Electricity costs have risen for all Australians, with Energy Australia customers paying 54% more than they were five years ago, Origin almost 50% more and AGL over a third more, Roy Morgan Research has found. It will come as a surprise that a fifth of Australians didn't even know which company was their electricity provider.

To see how much better you can do on your energy bills, you can use the free Australian government energy comparison site at energymadeeasy.gov.au **JODI BIRD**

Hanging up on nuisance calls

CHOICE has called for improvements to the Do Not Call Register to bring greater relief to Australian consumers plagued by unwanted calls. Along with fellow consumer advocates ACCAN, we made a submission to a review of the register. We told the government that rather than consumers having to remember to opt out of telemarketing calls, those who do want the calls should instead be able to opt in to receive them. This move would bring the register into line with Australia's email spam provisions.

The introduction of the register in 2007 allowed Australians to opt out of receiving telemarketing calls. Two-thirds of Australian households and almost four million mobile numbers have since signed up to opt out of nuisance calls.

If you haven't yet signed up for the Do Not Call Register, you can do so by visiting donotcall.gov.au

MADISON CARTWRIGHT

Retail not so super

Some bad news for retail super funds: they have comparatively low average investment returns and their members are more likely to switch funds.

In a battle of the fund representatives, The Financial Services Council reportedly said this is because retail fund members tend to be older and therefore choose more conservative investment options. However, the Australian Institute of Superannuation Trustees told the *Financial Standard* that if this were the case retail funds would outperform industry funds during downturns due to their more conservative investment options, but that hasn't happened.

Roy Morgan Research has also found that apart from a change in jobs, the main reason people switch super products is to seek a better investment performance, with retail superannuation fund members more likely to switch funds than industry super fund members.

JODI BIRD

4.9%

Return on investment with a retail super fund from 2004-13*

6.5-7%

Return in corporate, industry and public sector funds in the same period

Who cares about origin?

Australians' attitude to buying locally made products differs across the generations, according to Roy Morgan research. While more than 80% of boomers and pre-boomers said they try to buy Australian-made as often as possible, only 61% of Generation Y and 49% of Generation Z had the same sentiment.

Roy Morgan's Warren Reid says this isn't due to a lack of interest, but rather different buying habits; the products younger Australians buy either aren't made in Australia or are more expensive when locally produced.

This adds to what we already know about Australian-made shopping preferences. In 2012, Roy Morgan Research analysed how important it was to consumers that products across different categories were Australian-made. They found the preference for local products was strongest for food and beverages, with almost 90% of those surveyed saying they prefer to buy Australian-made or grown.

CHOICE wants to see improvements in country-of-origin labelling for food products to help those who do want to buy Australian make an informed choice.

ANGELA CARTWRIGHT

Academic feels worse on Swisse

Consumer health advocate Dr Ken Harvey has resigned his post at La Trobe University in protest against a recent partnership between the university and vitamin company Swisse.

Worth $15m over six years, the partnership will be used to establish a Complementary Medicines Evaluation Centre at the university. Using the centre for commissioned research, Swisse hopes to put some muscle behind its "clinically proven" claims, which have seen it taken to task by the Therapeutic Goods Administration advertising watchdog.

While in favour of complementary medicines research, former Adjunct Associate Professor Harvey argues that industry-sponsored research is more likely to report positive outcomes than trials funded by other sources, and contract research for industry can be specifically designed to provide a particular result. He's also concerned the partnership will present serious conflicts of interest for university staff involved, and that the arrangement will impact negatively on the university's reputation.

Swinburne University of Technology, which already collaborates with Swisse, will also be involved in the project. CHOICE understands that Swisse also approached Bond University and Monash University's School of Public Health, which both declined to participate.

KARINA BRAY

Time for transparency

More than 14,000 Australians signed CHOICE's petition calling for transparency in the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade treaty. So far, the TPP negotiations have been conducted in secrecy, with only government officials and certain US corporations having access to the process.

CHOICE recently presented the petition to members of parliament in Canberra and raised our concerns directly with the office of Trade Minister Andrew Robb. But we aren't ending things there. To find out how you can help with our ongoing campaign, visit **choice.com.au/releasethetext** For more on what the TPP may mean for you, visit **choice.com.au/tpp**

MADISON CARTWRIGHT

CHOICE CEO Alan Kirkland championing the cause for greater TPP transparency

One step forward, two steps back

The federal government has proposed legislative changes that will remove important consumer protections from the Future of Financial Advice (FoFA) legislation, which came into effect on July 2013. CHOICE is worried about the move, as we've advocated strongly over many years for reforms to the financial advice industry.

"The FoFA reforms were an important step towards creating an industry that puts consumers' interests first," says CHOICE CEO Alan Kirkland. "We're concerned that this progress will be reversed if these changes proceed as announced."

Two key changes will allow advisers to keep charging millions in ongoing fees without providing service:

- The requirement to obtain consent in writing from clients every two years to continue to charge fees is slated to be removed.
- An annual fees statement will now only be mandated for new clients since 1 July 2013.

Two other changes could mean a poorer quality of advice:

- Planned changes to the "best interests duty" remove protections from poor quality financial advice.
- An exemption from ban on conflicted remuneration for "general advice", may allow bias and mis-selling.

The changes will go before parliament later this year. We're investigating this issue and want to hear from you. Let us know your experiences with financial advisers by emailing us at **money@choice.com.au**

UTA MIHM

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK | *SOURCE: APRA

Funeral cover clean-up

ASIC's ongoing efforts to clean up the funeral insurance industry appear to have led to a change of strategy for one of its biggest providers.

According to the regulator, the TAL brand InsuranceLine had been broadcasting promotional claims in 2013 that could have misled customers. In particular, ASIC took issue with stepped premiums that were not "adequately disclosed or explained", conditions on advertising prices that were tucked away in the fine print, and quoted prices that didn't match the ages of the actors in the ads.

TAL put the brakes on the ad campaigns last year and indicated it would introduce a new range of products that offered level premiums for the life of the policy and capped premiums. CHOICE salutes the product overhaul as a move in the right direction. ASIC deputy chair Peter Kell argues that progressively increasing premiums and payments that can exceed the actual benefit "can be particularly difficult for consumers to understand".

ANDY KOLLMORGEN

Nip/tuck holidays

Health insurer NIB has announced it will begin offering surgical packages for overseas dental and cosmetic procedures.

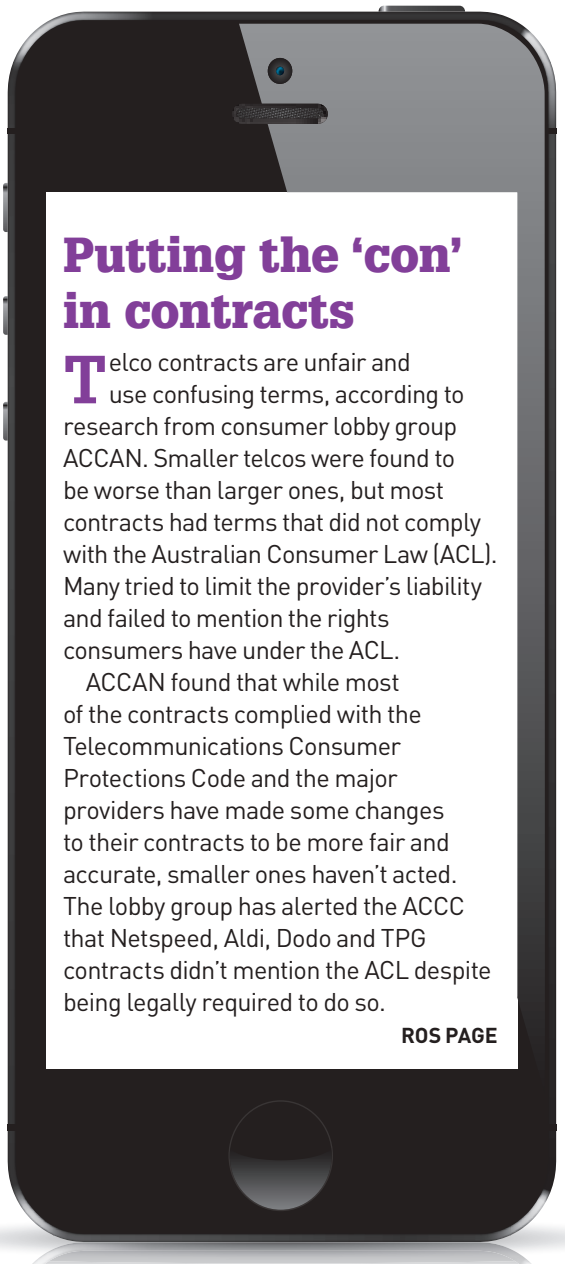
While it's no secret that Australians are increasingly seeking cheap dental and cosmetic treatment overseas, no insurers have even been willing to offer insurance to cover these so-called "nip/tuck holidays".

NIB says it will sell packages that include flights, treatment, accommodation and a concierge service in Asian countries including Malaysia and Indonesia.

But the Australian Medical Association (AMA) has raised concerns about the standard of care that patients might receive overseas. AMA president Dr Steve Hambleton suggests those considering going overseas should take standards and ongoing care into account, not just price.

For more info on overseas medical tourism, see *CHOICE*, Nov 11 or head to **choice.com.au/dentalholidays**

KATE BROWNE



Putting the 'con' in contracts

Telco contracts are unfair and use confusing terms, according to research from consumer lobby group ACCAN. Smaller telcos were found to be worse than larger ones, but most contracts had terms that did not comply with the Australian Consumer Law (ACL). Many tried to limit the provider's liability and failed to mention the rights consumers have under the ACL.

ACCAN found that while most of the contracts complied with the Telecommunications Consumer Protections Code and the major providers have made some changes to their contracts to be more fair and accurate, smaller ones haven't acted. The lobby group has alerted the ACCC that Netspeed, Aldi, Dodo and TPG contracts didn't mention the ACL despite being legally required to do so.

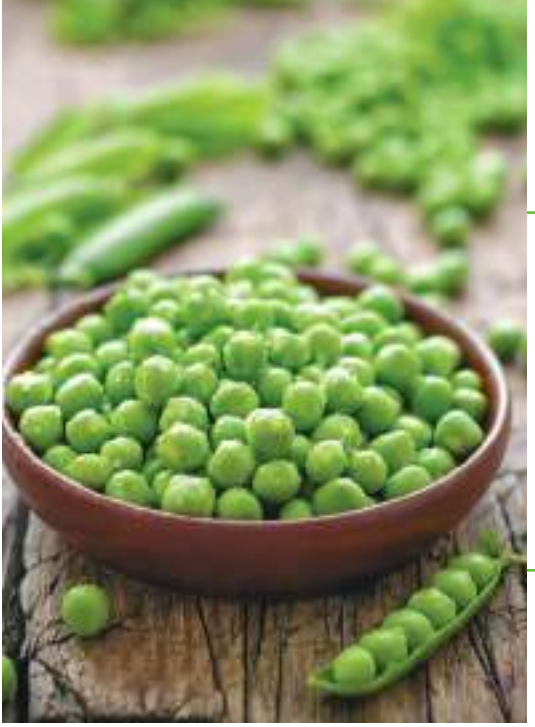
ROS PAGE

Ink rethink

Chinese scientists have discovered how to do away with printer ink by treating paper with water-responsive dyes and replacing the ink in an inkjet printer with water. And there's a significant environmental bonus: the text can be erased and rewritten without a loss in quality, allowing a single piece of paper to be reused numerous times. No word yet on when the technology will be available to the general public, but watch this space. **ZOYA SHEFTALOVICH**

Spam Act turns 10

Ten years after outlawing spam, Australians' inboxes are less heavy with junk mail, and we've dropped from the top 10 to number 44 on Sophos' list of spamming countries. The Spam Act was created a decade ago and, along with education, enforcement and industry partnerships, Australia has been working to fight the global problem of spam. ACMA reports there have been 126 investigations, with many resulting in warnings and infringements being issued, as well as three court cases resulting in penalties of just under $30m. To report spam, forward spam emails to report@submit.spam.acma.gov.au or SMS messages to 0429 999 888. **ROS PAGE**



Aussie veg

A new deal between Coles and frozen vegetable producer Simplot will mean an extra 2.7 million kilograms of produce for Coles' Smart Buy frozen veggie range will now be grown locally in Tasmania and NSW. The veggies were previously sourced from China, Thailand, NZ and Europe. **JEMMA CASTLE**

Pharmacy quits smoking

And now for something out of the "I can't believe it took so long!" files. One of the US's largest pharmacy chains, CVS, has announced it will no longer sell cigarette or tobacco products in its pharmacies. This starts from October this year, and CVS claims it's the first national chain to take that step. With more than 7600 locations around the US, the pharmacy estimates it will lose more than $US1.5bn in revenue annually as a result of the move.

ZOYA SHEFTALOVICH

42%
Approximate percentage of adult smokers in the US in 1965

18%
Approximate percentage today*

Don't turn a blind eye

The recent deaths of two toddlers caught in blind cords have prompted reminders from child safety authorities about the dangers posed by blind and curtain cords. Babies and young children can become entangled in the cords while playing or even sleeping in a cot or bed near a window, risking strangulation if they fall or roll over with the cord around their neck.

Parents and others caring for young children in their homes can take several steps to reduce the risks, including:

- gathering up cords and securing them out of reach – and moving any furniture the child could use to reach them
- using cleats or tensioning devices to secure long cords
- making sure new blinds meet the mandatory national standard
- choosing blinds and curtains that don't use cords or chains.

The ACCC has a leaflet with more tips and information – see accc.gov.au/publications/blind-and-curtain-cords-safety-alert **KARINA BRAY**

The buzz on energy prices

In an industry first, the Independent Pricing & Regulatory Tribunal has set a limit on the amount electricity suppliers in NSW can charge customers for breaking their contracts.

But the tribunal's ruling isn't a total win. From 1 March 2014, the early termination fees for some electricity retailers will be limited to $130 within the first 12 months and $45 thereafter, but providers will be allowed to exceed the caps to recover promotional upfront benefits.

In related energy news, in January this year the Consumer Action Law Centre (CALC) and Consumer Utilities Advocacy Centre submitted a proposal to the Australian Energy Market Commission that mid-contract tariff increases be banned – a proposal CHOICE strongly endorses. Now CALC has launched a new campaign to ban the practice of changing energy prices mid-contract.

While you'd be forgiven for thinking prices on a contract would be fixed, under current market rules, energy retailers can increase their prices whenever they want. So it pays to always read the small print, as the price you sign up for may not last long. Some retailers will offer energy at a very low rate to entice you to sign up, then increase the price once you've signed on. And given high early exit fees, it's unlikely you'll take your business elsewhere.

To sign CALC's petition to ensure fixed means fixed, head to fixit.org.au

JEMMA CASTLE & ANDY KOLLMORGEN

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK | *SOURCE: CVS

choice MEMBERS NOTICEBOARD

Lab Tours

If you'd like to go behind the scenes of CHOICE, join us for a free Lab Tour at our Marrickville (Sydney) office. You'll have the chance to view our 11 testing labs in action, chat with some of our testers, and enjoy morning tea with CHOICE CEO Alan Kirkland. You might even have the opportunity to partake in a tasty taste test! Places are still available for Wednesday 9 April, Monday 23 June, Friday 22 August and Wednesday 15 October. Log on to choice.com.au/labtours for more information and to make a booking.

L-R: CHOICE voting members Paul Szilard, Fiona Horton, Martin Hirst, Frances Watson, Peter Dajmovich, Simone Tannock and Ali Torbaty

Choc full of fun

There's nothing quite so challenging as a chocolate taste test. But how do you find a group of people willing to sort the luscious from the icky? Luckily, CHOICE had a group of dedicated voting members (above) willing to put their taste buds on the line. Our office was a sea of the gooey, melty, milk and dark stuff, and even the most diehard chocolate-loving visitors were suffering from choc-overload as they analysed their twelfth sample. You can read the full results of this test in *CHOICE*, Apr 14.

Stuck for a gift idea?

Give family and friends access to Australia's most trusted source of unbiased product reviews, arming them with all the information they need to choose right every time. There are a variety of CHOICE gift memberships to choose from. To find out more, go to **choice.com.au** and click the gift image.

Get social with CHOICE

Connect with us on Facebook, Twitter and Google+ to have your say on consumer issues, get involved with CHOICE campaigns, and be alerted when the latest reviews and articles are published online. Like us on Facebook **@ facebook.com/choiceaustralia** and follow us on Twitter **@ twitter.com/choiceaustralia**. You can also find us on Google+ at **+choiceaustralia**

Important information about your membership

For membership renewals due on or after 1 April 2014, the prices of some membership packages are changing. You'll receive a direct communication to remind you again at least six weeks prior to your renewal date. To check whether this affects your membership, go to **choice.com.au/2014membership** For more information, or call our friendly Customer Service team on 1800 069 552.

The low-value tax

CHOICE has recommended that the government not lower or abolish the low-value tax threshold (LVT), which ensures that consumers who purchase goods and services from overseas don't pay GST for purchases below $1000.

Some Australian retailers are campaigning to lower the LVT to, in their words, "level [the] playing field" between Australian and international retailers. But CHOICE has found almost all evidence to date shows that because of the high collection costs involved, lowering the LVT would cost more money than it would raise. Worse, processing fees could cost consumers up to 70% of their purchase over and above the GST. This means a $20 book from Amazon could cost as much as $36 – only $2 of which would be tax revenue.

CHOICE supports the principle of tax neutrality. However, in our submission to the government ahead of the federal budget due in May, we urged them not to lower or abolish the LVT in the absence of a business case proving it could actually work effectively. With purchases below the LVT being less than two per cent of all retail sales in Australia, it's clear the main challenges facing the retail industry lie elsewhere.

MADISON CARTWRIGHT

Seeing red over light therapy

Medical experts have warned consumers off near-infrared therapy for stroke rehabilitation, stating there's no good evidence it works.

The therapy is sometimes promoted as a non-invasive, safe treatment to help patients suffering strokes and head injuries recover cognitive and motor function. Advocates suggest it has the effect of providing an energy jolt to injured nerve cells, potentially counterbalancing the effects of injury. Increasing blood flow to the area is also proposed to have a positive effect.

Unfortunately, however, the theory is ahead of the science. A fundamental sticking point is that the limited evidence for this effect comes from small mammals, and the thicker human skull means the infrared waves can't penetrate as deeply.

Infrared therapy offered by chiropractors and physiotherapists is useful for musculoskeletal injuries, where it has a warming effect and increases blood flow. But experts don't recommend its use for stroke, brain injuries or conditions such as Parkinson's disease.

KARINA BRAY

Peanut allergy breakthrough

Mums eating peanuts while pregnant could be protecting their babies from peanut allergies, a new study has indicated.

Research conducted by the Boston Children's Hospital found women who didn't have a peanut allergy and ate peanuts during pregnancy had babies with a lower incidence of the allergy.

Pregnant women in the US have previously been advised not to eat peanuts. The study's senior author, Dr Michael Young, says that although it's not possible to say for certain that avoiding peanuts caused an increase in allergies, avoidance certainly didn't stop the rising number of allergy cases.

The study provides new data to support the hypothesis that early allergen exposure increases tolerance and reduces risk of food allergies. But don't reach for the legumes just yet – the data isn't strong enough to prove that eating peanuts will definitely prevent peanut allergy.

MIRANDA HERRON

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

Costly Christmas hangover

Aussie consumers will pay dearly for their 2013 Christmas shopping binge, according to the latest Dun & Bradstreet Consumer Financial Stress Index. In the first quarter of 2013, the volume of consumer debts referred to D&B for collection jumped by 17% over the previous quarter. In the first three months of 2012, the increase was 33%.

The Australian National Retailers Association has estimated that consumers spent nearly $1bn a day during December 2013, and this time the stress is forecasted to continue until at least June. Spendthrift habits can be particularly damaging in light of a new credit reporting system set to take effect in March 2014. The new rules allow lenders to record more information about the repayment behaviour of consumers, including the listing of credit card bills that are paid five days (or longer) late.

ANDY KOLLMORGEN

An important Bit of news

US online retailer overstock.com has become the first major online retailer to accept crypto-currency Bitcoins as a form of payment.

Bitcoins are an anonymous international digital currency that allow people to perform financial transactions without having to pass through a bank. Overstock.com, which has one million products available and ships to Australia, converts its Bitcoins into US dollars through the digital wallet provider Coinbase.

Bitcoins are on the rise, with app QuicklyPay.it launched to allow you to securely manage and split group payments such as rent, bills and drinks or dinner using Bitcoins. **JEMMA CASTLE**

FIRST LOOK

A clean sweep

It can be supremely frustrating to spend time vacuuming and cleaning your floors only to find the very next day that dust has settled, lint is floating around and pet hair seems to be everywhere. But there's good news – if you're looking for a robot vacuum that'll clean up that mess for you but don't want to fork out the big bucks, look for the Sabco RoboSweep.

The RoboSweep's microfibre cloth, which can be chucked in the washing machine or cleaned by hand, picks up lint, dust and hair and is designed to sweep hard, smooth floors such as timber floorboards, porcelain and ceramic tiles and linoleum. Charge the battery for three hours, attach the microfibre pad to the cage and select the cleaning time. You can choose a 30-, 60- or 90-minute cleaning cycle. Then, insert the ball in the cage and let the RoboSweep do its thing.

While Sabco claims it has smart technology to sense walls, we found the RoboSweep will run into walls and other obstacles before changing direction to move around them. But it does glide under most furniture, and its microfibre pad gets into corners to cover those hard-to-reach places.

After testing the RoboSweep on hard floors for three days we were impressed with its cleaning ability and found it to be effective at picking up fine dust, lint and hair. While it doesn't make much noise while cleaning compared to other household appliances, the sound it makes while moving around on the floor can become annoying after a while.

You'll eventually need to purchase replacement microfibre cloths (available at Bunnings) that cost $4 for a single pack and $10 for a pack of three. It's also a good idea to keep pets away while using the RoboSweep – they might easily mistake it for a toy.

CHOICE verdict

The RoboSweep is great for general dusting of hard floors. It won't replace your vacuum, but it's a useful cleaning tool to use on a daily basis while you're out and about and in between big cleans. **REBECCA CIARAMIDARO**

SABCO ROBOSWEEP
PRICE $48
CONTACT sabco.com.au
★★★★½

Cheaper groceries on the cards

Consumers stand to benefit from lower grocery prices as a new discounting agreement between Coles, Woolworths and the ACCC takes effect.

Discounting that previously applied to petrol purchases has been wound back to a maximum of four cents per litre. The estimated annual cost savings of up to $500m will be reallocated to grocery discounts, with supermarket loyalty cardholders most likely to benefit. Petrol discounting deals may still be offered by the supermarket chains, but must be based on sales at affiliated service stations rather than supermarkets.

The new agreement is expected to drive grocery prices down generally due to increased competition in the grocery sector, and also ease pressure on independent petrol retailers, which have suffered under the grocery-based discounting scheme. **KARINA BRAY**

A movie a second

South Korea has announced plans to roll out a 5G internet network, which they say will be 1000 times faster than the world's current fastest network, 4G, by 2020. The network will theoretically allow users to download a full-length film in one second, compared with 40 seconds on the current 4G network. South Korea currently has the highest average internet speeds and has been instrumental in developing new technology for internet networks. **JEMMA CASTLE**

Veggie sandwich

Bread fortified with vegetables such as carrot, capsicum, zucchini, celery, leek, pumpkin and spinach is now hitting Canadian shelves. The country's two biggest bakeries are producing bread that has a serve of vegetables per slice. The move is in response to a decline in traditional bread sales as people avoid it due to concerns about gluten, carbohydrates and salt content, among other factors. **MIRANDA HERRON**

Burning up

The ACCC has issued a warning about the dangers of decorative ethanol burners (sometimes used in fireplaces, as heaters or as an alternative to candles) after hearing of several serious burn injuries related to the devices in Australia. According to the ACCC, the majority of the injuries occurred during the refilling of the burner while it was still lit or warm.

There have been 22 reported cases of consumers suffering injuries, ranging from minor burns to serious burns covering up to 55% of the body, and it's likely that more cases that weren't reported to the ACCC are out there. **ZOYA SHEFTALOVICH**

Fee or cut?

In the continuing debate about Australia's looming health budget crisis, a $6 fee for GP visits has been floated as a potential problem-solver. But a Grattan Institute report predicts removing the private health insurance rebate would produce a far greater saving. A $6 fee could save $749m over the next four years, but the institute has found cutting the private health insurance rebate would produce savings of $3bn annually.

The 30% rebate cost the government $5.5bn in 2012-13, but the associated increase in costs incurred by the public system would be about $2.5bn. The Melbourne Institute's Terence Cheng says this is because people with private health insurance currently use both the public and private systems, and public hospitals already deal with the most complex and expensive medical cases. **JODI BIRD**

$5.5bn
Cost of the federal health insurance rebate annually

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

Your Say

We want to hear from you. If you've had a bad experience, been ripped off or scammed, tell us and help other CHOICE members avoid the same traps. If you've had a great response to a complaint you've taken to a manufacturer or retailer, our members want to know about that too! Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

Contact us!

Email us at **yoursay@choice.com.au** or write to Your Say, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville, NSW 2204

Insuring against rip-offs

Each year when it comes time to renew my car insurance, I go online to obtain quotes for the forthcoming year from a range of insurers, including my current one (GIO). Surprisingly, I've found those with extensive TV ads claiming they can save you money tend to be among the most expensive. AAMI is the exception, and is competitive at $540.

I included Woolworths and Coles this year, whose quotes were $770 and $540 respectively for my 2011 Skoda Superb Elegance. My GIO renewal premium was $646, but by going online and getting a quote with exactly the same conditions this came down to $517, a 20% saving. Are they trying to attract new policyholders at the expense of existing ones?

Trevor Drover, Kaleen, ACT

CHOICE SAYS *In our last car insurance review* (CHOICE, *Mar 13), one-third of car insurers admitted that, all other factors being equal, premiums for new business will be less than those for renewal. In other words, they are indeed trying to nab new policyholders from their competitors. But most existing policyholders just renew without checking for a better deal, so the insurers aren't as worried about losing existing customers.*

Several insurers attribute the difference to the online discount, which is generally available to new customers but not included when renewals are sent to existing ones (although the online discount is usually 10% and the online price is often more than 10% less).

We recommend always shopping around with at least four insurers, including your current one, before renewing your premium. Your case is a perfect example of how you can save money doing this.

Vacuum after-sales service that sucks

I read with interest your story about the Australian Consumer Law (*CHOICE*, Dec 13/Jan 14).

The turbine head on my Dyson vacuum cleaner recently failed. A new floor tool costs $129. Since we've used both the turbine head as well the plain tool, the former has not done a lot of work. So its failure came as a surprise.

When I contacted Dyson Service, they provided standard cleaning instructions of which I was well aware. Partial disassembly revealed that the fan had split in two places. Given my knowledge of plastics and exhaust fans I believed the splits to be the result of poor manufacture.

Dyson has ignored my request for a replacement on the basis of premature failure. A trip to their local service centre gave me a diagnosis of failed bearings (which I think is incorrect). They blamed me for not lubricating the phosphor bronze bearings on the brush shaft!

Having asked around, I discovered a friend of mine had a similar failure last year and paid about $100 for a "repair", i.e. they supplied a new tool. I wonder how many CHOICE members have had a similar experience.

Peter Thornley, Adelaide, SA

Beyondblue wants people who have been discriminated against on the basis of a mental health issue to get in touch

Shining a light on a poor policy

LETTER OF THE MONTH

I am writing to commend you for highlighting how people who've had a mental illness are getting a raw deal when it comes to accessing or claiming insurance (*CHOICE*, Feb 14). Even if they have long recovered from depression or anxiety,for example, they may not qualify for cover, particularly when it comes to income protection, life and travel insurance.

Although there may be exceptions, and each case depends on its individual facts, the stories we've heard lead us to believe generally that many people with mental health problems are being discriminated against by the insurance industry – and it's time this stopped.

For more than 10 years, beyondblue has been working to persuade the insurance industry to make changes to their policies and practices so people with current or past mental health concerns can access products in the same way as everyone else.

It's time for action.

I would encourage everyone who feels aggrieved by the policies or practices of their insurer to contact the company directly to express their concerns.

Beyondblue also wants people who feel they've been discriminated against on the basis of a mental health issue to email us at theinsuranceproject@beyondblue.org.au and tell us their story. We're collecting these stories with a view to supporting people to get justice.

This is a serious issue and one that requires action. Without it, the insurance industry will be slow to change.

Kate Carnell, AO
beyondblue CEO
Hawthorn West, Vic

Thumbs

I bought a very inexpensive Lumina Signature cyclonic vacuum cleaner from Aldi. It cost less than a third of my previous two vacuums (both recommended by CHOICE), so I didn't expect the warranty to cover very much. But at the beginning of this year, I told them about a broken hose-sliding clip. Five days later, a new hose unit arrived by courier. Impressive!

Sheila Griffiths, Cooranbong, NSW

We had a Masters gift voucher that had been expired for three months but still had some dollars left on it. So we asked the staff there if it was possible to use our expired card, and they were wonderful! They transferred the balance to another, current, card that we then used.

As well, our son and daughter-in-law recently purchased an Asko dishwasher after reading your review (*CHOICE*, Nov 13). Thanks CHOICE!

Marleen Wicki, Bassendean, WA

In 2000 my wife and I had a new kitchen designed and built using the Hettich MultiTech drawer system. After 13 years of continuous trouble-free operation, the diecast right-hand drawer front bracket on one of the drawers fractured.

The design of these brackets has changed over the years, but when we emailed Hettich Australia asking if we could purchase a replacement bracket they replied instantly, to the effect that two brackets (left and right) would be mailed to us that day without charge. The brackets arrived by the next post and, and the drawer is now as good as new. We're very impressed with Hettich Australia.

Walter & Rosemary Hume, Willoughby, NSW

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

Residual value

Is it worth spending more to buy pesticide-free produce? The answer, as **Miranda Herron** discovers, is far more complicated that you might imagine

From supermarkets and greengrocers to farmers' markets, when it comes to choosing the best place for buying fresh fruit and vegetables there are a mind-boggling array of variations in freshness, taste, nutrition and food safety. You may well find fresher fruit at Coles than at the local fresh-from-the-farm market, depending on how it was farmed, picked, transported and stored. Or vice-versa (see page 18).

One thing you can be sure of is a wide variation in price. When CHOICE recently went fruit and veg shopping, we paid from $2.99/kg for grapes at Aldi up to $8.98/kg at a certified-organic market stall.

It's well known that one reason people are prepared to pay more for organic is to avoid pesticide residues. But is there really a big difference in residue levels between organic and conventional fruit and vegetables?

To find out, we sent nine samples of Australian-grown grapes to a lab to test for 220+ pesticides. The results found 12 different pesticides overall (see opposite), all of which, thankfully, were below legal limits.

What we found

Unsurprisingly, the organic samples contained no detectable pesticide

CAN YOU WASH OFF PESTICIDES?

Pesticides are often formulated to resist being washed off easily in order to survive rain. Peeling removes residues, but the peel itself also contains valuable nutrients.

Some pesticides are systemic, which means they penetrate the flesh of the fruit or vegetable. So washing isn't totally effective in these cases, though it's a good idea to wash them anyway to remove dirt and potentially harmful bacteria. It also helps to throw away the outer leaves of leafy veggies such as lettuce or cabbage.

residues. But neither did the greengrocer sample. At the other end of the spectrum, Aldi and the regular grapes from the farmers' markets had the highest number of residues, closely followed by the supposedly "pesticide-free" sample from the farmers' market (see below). The latter result was interesting, because the stall-keeper at the farmers' market was evasive when asked about the origin of the grapes and whether they were certified (they weren't).

Our results are, of course, just a single snapshot of the fruit and veg market. The amount of residue can vary depending on the amount of pests in a growing region, farmer practice and when the grapes are exposed to the chemical – if applied before the fruit starts to develop, it usually means little residue will be present by the time the fruit matures.

The time to market also makes a difference. Most modern chemicals degrade fairly quickly in days or weeks,

It's impossible to tell how many pesticides occur in your food and at what level

Pesticide test results

NO DETECTABLE PESTICIDE

- Certified organic from farmers' market ($8.98/kg)
- Certified organic from a home delivery box ($8.80/kg)
- Greengrocer ($2.99/kg)

COLES ($3.90/KG)

- Iprodione 1.6% of maximum residue levels (MRL)
- Pyrimethanil at less than 1% of MRL

SULPHUR-FREE* FROM FARMERS' MARKET ($10.70/KG)

- Boscalid at less than 1% of MRL

WOOLWORTHS ($3.98/KG)

- Methomyl at less than 1% of MRL
- Prothiofos at 1.5% of MRL

"PESTICIDE-FREE" FROM FARMERS' MARKET ($6.99/KG)

- Pyrimethanil at 3.8% of MRL
- Pyraclostrobin at 1% of MRL
- Trichlorforn at 20% of MRL
- Trifloxystrobin at 2% of MRL

ALDI ($2.99/KG)

- Chlorpyrifos at 3% of MRL
- Imidacloprid at 20% of MRL
- Methoxyfenozide at 1% of MRL
- Methomyl at 5% of MRL
- Pyrimethanil at less than 1% of MRL

REGULAR GRAPES FROM THE FARMERS' MARKET ($5.99/KG)

- Methomyl at 10% MRL
- Myclobutanil at 3% of MRL
- Pyraclostrobin at less than 1% MRL
- Pyrimethanil at less than 1% MRL
- Prothiofos at 1.5% MRL

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK | * OUR ANALYSIS DID NOT INCLUDE A TEST FOR SULPHUR, WHICH IS ALLOWED AS A NATURAL FUNGICIDE ON ORGANIC GRAPES.

FRESH IS BEST

There are many factors affecting the freshness, nutrition and taste of your food. Most fruit and veggies are 70-90% water, and once harvested immediately start losing moisture and degrading in quality and nutritional value, so the less time between harvest and plate there is, the better.

Although time since harvest is important, there are many other factors influencing quality, including the particular variety, soil health, growing methods (fertilisers high in nitrogen can reduce vitamin C levels), changes in temperature and humidity during transport, and storage methods. As well:

- The nutrient content and taste is optimised if produce is picked ripe.
- Bruising leads to a loss of nutrients, so produce should be gently handled. Handpicking is less likely to damage produce than mechanical.
- Soft or leafy fruit and veg have high levels of water-soluble C vitamins that are unstable, so the fresher they are when you eat them, the better. Shrivelling and yellowing is a sign of ageing and moisture loss.
- Minerals and antioxidants such as carotenoids (which give tomatoes their red colour) are more stable than water-soluble vitamins, as are the nutrients in root veggies, so time since harvest is less crucial.

LET'S GO SHOPPING

When it comes to sourcing the freshest and best-tasting produce, apart from other obvious signs such as over- or under-ripeness, bruising, wilting or mould, it's pretty much pot luck with a dash of trial and error.

Supermarket vs greengrocer

"It's impossible to say whether produce is fresher or better quality from a supermarket or greengrocer," says professor Ron Wills from the University of Newcastle's School of Environmental and Life Sciences. "It varies widely because it comes down to the efficiency of the management of each store. Like supermarkets, most grocers have cold-storage rooms and quality depends on how well the staff are trained to understand what should and shouldn't be refrigerated."

Buying from central wholesale markets daily or every second day means greengrocers are less likely than supermarkets to keep large amounts of produce in storage for long periods. And, says Colin Gray, CEO of the NSW Chamber of Fruit & Vegetable Industries, as small business owners, grocers try to differentiate from supermarkets with their wider knowledge of produce and personal service.

However, the problems of slow turnover and produce quality declining while it sits on the shelf can affect both supermarkets and greengrocers.

The supply chain process is similar for both. Produce is taken from farms by truck to a central distribution hub. For greengrocers it's a central market in each city, and for the supermarkets it's their own distribution hubs.

The time between paddock and plate is also similar. Bananas, for example, are typically sourced from the same region, with the smaller farmers sending produce to central markets and the supermarkets dealing directly with bigger farms. For both, produce would be picked before being completely ripe to prevent bruising during travel.

Labels will tell you the country of origin. But for Australian produce, unless there is a label showing which farm or region, it's hard to know how far it's travelled or how long it's been stored.

Farmers' markets

There's been an explosion of farmers' markets, from the very first in Victoria in 1999 to more than 160 across Australia today, according to the Australian Farmers' Market Association. True farmers' markets have growers selling directly to customers their own produce or added-value foods such as jam or cheese that they've made, but not necessarily grown, from scratch.

Of all the produce outlets, you probably have the best chance of finding out the provenance of the food at a farmers' market. The food is likely to be seasonal and picked ripe, and there are often unusual varieties not offered elsewhere. For some small farmers who can't produce enough volume to supply to wholesale markets or supermarkets, it can be their only source of income.

However, there is no national accreditation system for farmers' markets, and each market has different rules about how "local" food has to be – produce isn't necessarily direct from the farm.

You really only have the vendor's word about freshness, farming methods, how it's been stored and how far it's travelled. And despite the perception that farmers' markets offer more sustainably farmed produce, unless it is certified organic it may have been grown using the same chemicals as conventionally farmed produce.

Given the potential profits to be made from premium produce, it can be tempting for stall-holders to backfill their genuine farm produce with produce they've not grown themselves. But Jane Adams from the Australian Farmers' Markets Association argues other stall-holders are pretty quick to spot irregularities. To determine authenticity, look for certification information for organic foods and have a chat with the grower. Farmers' market regulars we spoke to say they use their instinct to pick genuine farmers from traders who are reselling goods from a wholesale market.

so fruit and veg can have higher residue levels if eaten shortly after harvest. This may account for the farmers' market sample having higher detectable levels of pesticide residues.

What our findings reveal is that for consumers, it's impossible to tell how many pesticides are in your food and at what level. If you are concerned about avoiding all pesticides, certified organic is probably your best bet.

Conclusions from a systematic review published in 2012 were in line with our results. While they found that organic produce is not always more nutritious than conventional produce, it is less likely to be contaminated with pesticides and antibiotic-resistant bacteria. It's also a farming method that focuses on being better for the environment, animal welfare and for the health of farm workers.

But organic produce is more expensive and is not widely available in some areas, so should you be fretting about pesticide residues if you can't afford it? "Australians don't eat enough fruit and vegetables as it is," says Tim Crowe, associate professor of nutrition at Deakin University. "If you have to make a choice, the health benefits of making sure you get your daily five serves veg and two of fruit outweigh the risks about whether or not it's organic."

WHO MONITORS PESTICIDES IN YOUR FOOD?

While state and territory governments police the maximum residue levels (MRLs) for fruits and veggies, there are no mandatory testing requirements and the system has been described as complicated and uncoordinated. In response, the fruit and veg industry has set up a variety of tests to monitor microbial and chemical residues in their products.

WHOLESALE MARKETS

The FreshTest program run by wholesale markets (which supply greengrocers) takes about 5000 samples annually from around the country. Testing for more than 100 chemicals, it reports a 95% MRL compliance rate.

SUPERMARKETS

- Coles tests a random selection of fresh produce each month for 129 chemicals, including domestic, organic and imported produce, and says it has a failure rate of zero per cent.
- Aldi outsources monthly testing, and produce suppliers are required to carry out a program of pesticide residue analysis by an independent lab.
- Woolworths declined to comment.

ORGANIC

Peak body Organic Federation of Australia says it tests five per cent of certified organic produce in the marketplace, with a 99.9% compliance rate. Australian Certified Organic randomly tests domestic and imported organic products. It has conducted 100 tests in the past six months, screening for 50 chemicals with a reported 99% free of any chemicals and one per cent with residues with levels that are legal for conventional food.

IMPORTED FOODS

"There is probably a higher risk associated with foods imported from some developing countries where lack of farmer education may mean less stringent pesticide practices," says Dr Christopher Preston, associate professor, School of Agriculture, Food & Wine at The University of Adelaide. The Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service tests 5% of imported fruit and vegetables for compliance with MRLs.

APPLES THROUGH THE AGES

Most apples are harvested between February and April, so they're often placed straight into a controlled cold storage, effectively putting them to "sleep" and then distributed gradually throughout the year. Once removed, the apples "wake up" and start ripening again. Incorrect storage can cause flavour loss or a brown core. "People may not like the idea of cold storage, but would they prefer to eat Australian apples all year or to eat imported apples?" asks Colin Gray from the NSW Chamber of Fruit & Vegetable Industries.

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

DELAYED REACTION

Ethylene is a gas that occurs naturally in fruit and veg and triggers the ripening process.

Fruits such as bananas, tomatoes, avocados, apples, mangos, pears and peaches continue to ripen after harvest as they produce their own ethylene.

In order to get fruits to market without damage they're usually picked before ripening, transported and then exposed to ethylene gas. There doesn't appear to be any evidence that exposure to ethylene is harmful to crops, but if crops are picked too early they may not ripen completely. They can reach full colour, but not necessarily full nutrition.

Other fruit such as raspberries, cherries, grapes, lemons, oranges, pineapples and strawberries don't ripen after harvest, but oranges and lemons can be made to look less green by exposure to ethylene gas.

With a structure similar to ethylene, 1-methylcyclopropene (1-MCP) is used to block the fruits and veggies' ethylene receptors, slowing the ripening. It's used in cold storage and controlled atmosphere for tomatoes, pears, plums, avocadoes and kiwi fruit. ■

The good oil?

Coconut oil is being pitched as the next big thing – but does it really deliver on all its big claims? **Kate Browne** finds out

While coconut oil isn't a new product, the media has recently been awash with stories extolling its virtues – not to mention the tsunami of celebrities who suddenly swear by it (see opposite). Websites are full of converts who are adding it to smoothies, drizzling it over salads and even downing it by the spoonful in a quest for better health.

Some of the (many) claims about coconut oil include that it:

- controls sugar cravings
- controls weight
- eases digestion
- boosts your metabolism
- provides stress relief and boosts immunity.

One CHOICE staffer was even told recently in a beauty salon that applying virgin coconut oil would help the hair in her eyebrows grow back!

But before you head to the health food section of your supermarket for your own jar of miracle oil, CHOICE found out what the experts have to say about this year's latest dietary trend.

What is it?

Coconut oil is extracted from the flesh of the coconut. It has a slight nutty flavour and works well in both savoury and sweet dishes. It's particularly popular in vegan cooking and can replace dairy products to make pastry and creamy desserts. It has a very high smoking point when cooking as well as a long shelf life.

Nuts about coconuts

Melbourne-based dietitian Zoe Nicholson, from private consultancy Figureate, says she's seeing an increase in clients who are asking about coconut oil and cooking with it. "Some believe the claims about weight loss, boosting the immune system and fighting various diseases, and others are using it because everyone is talking about it and shops are selling it as the new best thing. "

Dr Kellie Bilinski, an Accredited Practising Dietitian and spokesperson for the Dietitians Association of Australia, believes the increased interest in coconut oil has been driven by those who are following sugar-free and paleo diets.

Don't believe the hype

Despite its popularity, both our experts warn that while using coconut oil may have a few health benefits, none of the claims above have yet been properly researched or proven.

But they eat it in Asia...

The fact that coconut oil is so high in saturated fat needs to be considered in the context of a Western diet, says Nicholson. While much Asian cuisine uses coconut in many forms, coconut is/was one of only a few sources of saturated fat. "Traditionally they don't tuck into cheese, butter, chocolate, bacon or fast food – just to name a few common sources of saturated fat in the Western diet."

A healthier alternative

- Most plant-based oils are healthy, good alternatives, and are likely to cost less as well.
- Rice bran and peanut oil are great for stir-frying, while extra-virgin olive oil is good for cooking on moderate heat and for salad dressings. Canola and sunflower oils are also suitable for cooking.

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

Anatomy of a trend

When it comes to any kind of trend, like that of coconut oil, there's usually a catalyst. Consumer psychologist and adman Adam Ferrier wrote his PhD on what makes things cool. His number one finding was that it's impossible for something to be cool without cool people using it.

Henrik Vejlgaard is the author of *Anatomy of a Trend*, which examines the lifecycle of the trend process. The former academic and sociologist outlines a number of key elements he believes contribute to the development of a trend. According to Vejlgaard, trends tend to start in major global cities (he cites New York, LA, Milan, Tokyo and London as examples) and are kicked off by trendsetters – a particular personality type who are key influencers in their social groups and are open to change. The tastes of these key influencers are often picked up quickly in major cities and adopted by other influential groups such as designers and celebrities. There is then a cycle of observing and copying by the wider population with the help of the media.

And when it comes to extolling the wonders of coconut oil, plenty of cool people are getting in on the act, from Angelina Jolie to popular Australian anti-sugar advocate and media personality Sarah Wilson. But the oil's most prominent proponent is arguably supermodel Miranda Kerr, who she says she eats it by the spoonful every day, as well as using it in her hair and skincare routine.

Added to that already potent mix, are preliminary studies showing there may be some evidence of benefits (which may be misinterpreted or generalised into pop science). And it's not long before the product is trickling down from a global phenomenon to the local supermarket shelves and reaching saturation point.

THE CONS

- All coconut oil, whether virgin or refined, is high in saturated fat (higher than butter) so it is considered a solid fat. One tablespoon of coconut oil provides 490kJ / 117 calories, 13.6g total fat (including 11.8g of saturated fat), no protein or carbohydrates, and only trace amounts of a few nutrients.
- One of the main concerns surrounds the type of fat. The fatty acids found in coconut oil raise LDL (the bad cholesterol), just like foods with other saturated fats, such as butter. And while coconut may also raise HDL (the good cholesterol) it doesn't do it as much as foods high in unsaturated fats do.
- While coconut oil doesn't contain cholesterol, it also doesn't stack up against most other plant-based oils. Canola, corn, safflower, sunflower, soybean, flaxseed, grape seed and extra-virgin olive oil all contain significantly less saturated fat.
- The fact that coconut oil is so high in saturated fat needs to be considered in the context of a Western diet, which is typically already high. Cancer Council Australia recommends reducing or avoiding a diet high in saturated fats.
- It's expensive! At around twice the price of olive oil, coconut oil hasn't yet been shown to offer health benefits greater than extra virgin olive oil. Extra virgin olive oil has proven heart health benefits, whereas the evidence for coconut oil is limited.

THE PROS

- Coconut oil does have some antioxidant properties, potentially because of plant nutrients called phenolic compounds.
- It's an unusual blend of short- and medium-chain fatty acids not seen in other saturated fats, which may offer some health benefits. However, research is yet to confirm this.
- While coconut oil can be part of a healthy diet, it's not necessary for optimal nutrition. Most plant oils provide health benefits, particularly extra virgin olive oil, which has proven health benefits. ■

Working vacations

Volunteering abroad may sound like a great way to do some good while enjoying a holiday. But who really stands to profit? **Jemma Castle** finds out

Whether you're looking for something to do in your gap year, an alternative travel experience or a meaningful retirement activity, volunteer placements abroad are promoted as a chance to make a real difference.

It certainly sounds like a win-win situation benefiting the community and the volunteer. The catch, however, is that volunteer projects aren't always mutually beneficial. Poorly thought-out projects often don't help communities, which means well-intentioned volunteers can find themselves in places where they aren't needed.

Organisations sending volunteers have also become increasingly commercialised due to an influx of for-profit companies and travel agencies. Some organisations spend the majority of a volunteer's fee on admin, marketing and organisational costs rather than on in-country living costs and the local project.

Volunteering abroad, also known as "voluntourism", is the new backpacking, says Stephen Wearing, an associate professor at the University of Technology, Sydney who specialises in volunteer tourism. But voluntourists will tend to pay a significant amount more than a backpacker, he says. "Once [it's] commodified like it is now, you just get projects that are put there for keen tourists to do."

The global voluntourism market has experienced a rapid increase in the past 25 years. In 2008, the industry had an estimated annual value of $US1.7-2.6bn. About 1.6 million volunteers a year take part, predominantly from wealthy countries.*

Pointless activity

Volunteer projects have the potential to do a lot of good. But too often, well-intentioned volunteers arrive at projects only to find their good intentions go to waste. A report by UK think tank Demos in 2011 found a significant number of voluntourists felt the work could have been done by locals, and were unsure as to whether their voluntary work actually benefited the communities.

Well-intentioned volunteers can find themselves in places where they aren't needed

One reason for this is the advertising used by companies wanting to sell trips, which may give volunteers an over-inflated sense of their usefulness. Short trips are increasingly being designed to suit the convenience and motivations of the volunteer rather than the community.

Community involvement in planning the project is key to its success. Projects that aren't well thought out and simply outsourced to local partners without close supervision will often be unhelpful. In addition, projects that are developed without input from the community can fail because they don't meet their needs or values. "A good company will spend a couple of years deciding how that project is going to work," says Wearing.

To find the right volunteer project, it's important to understand the complexities of the development landscape. Trips that offer cultural training programs and inductions prior to departure are a positive start.

Where's the money going?

Few organisations are truly transparent about how volunteers' fees are spent. CHOICE asked 18 voluntourism providers for an average breakdown

DO IT YOURSELF?

While agencies can offer some peace of mind about security and take the stress out of organising a placement, they don't do this for free. In fact, it can account for more than half the price you pay. One option to avoid the high price tag is to cut out the middleman and go directly to the local organisation yourself. But by doing this you take a higher risk. You'll need to do a lot of legwork to make sure the organisation is legitimate and the project is beneficial. "It's not an easy landscape to navigate – it's easy to get shonky dealers," says Wearing. Various online sites such as grassrootsvolunteering.org, globalhelpswap.com and idealist.org can be a good starting point, but the options they provide aren't vetted.

When help is not needed

In 2007, Kalia Forde signed up with for-profit company, Antipodeans Abroad, to teach at a rural school in India for three months. As she was only 18 at the time, she decided to pay $3750 for Antipodeans Abroad to set up the placement so that she knew she would be looked after in a foreign country.

But on arrival in India, she found her help wasn't needed. There was no school for her to teach at and no meaningful volunteer work for her to do. The local partner she'd been outsourced to, India Study Abroad Centre (ISAC), was instead searching for projects where she could volunteer.

Kalia was sent to a local school to arrange work, but was told the students had exams coming up and their schedules should not be disrupted. In search of another opportunity, she was sent to an ashram as a test-run. But when she arrived, even the centre's director was confused as to why she was there and what she could do.

"It was as haphazard as if I were organising it myself," she says. "No-one from the company had been to the project [in Pen, the local village]".

Antipodeans Abroad had been working with ISAC for three years, but it had only started sending volunteers to Pen about six months earlier.

Colin Carpenter, managing director at Antipodeans Abroad, says he had met with the director of ISAC prior to Forde's trip. "Clearly ISAC hadn't done their work properly on the ground," says Carpenter. "We don't always get it right, but most times we do. We also do our best to rectify situations that don't turn out well." Following a complaint about the trip, Antipodeans Abroad sent Kalia on another trip free of charge and paid half the cost of her airfares, an experience she describes positively.

Carpenter maintains ISAC is a reputable organisation, but his company doesn't currently offer placements through it for a range of reasons.

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK1 *SOURCE: ASSOCIATION FOR TOURISM AND LEISURE EDUCATION

THE BUSINESS OF ORPHANS

Some orphanages in countries such as Nepal and Cambodia have turned to tourism to take advantage of the increased demand from paying volunteers.

Between 2005 and 2010, the number of orphanages in Cambodia increased 75% and the number of children in them increased 90%. A UNICEF report found these orphanages have little financial accountability and are run predominantly on overseas donations or volunteer funds, fuelling a market for orphanages that do more harm than good.

There are also serious safety risks for children as many orphanages don't have child protection policies or conduct background checks. Research also shows the detrimental consequences of constant short-term exposure of new

of where volunteers' funds are spent, but very few produced anything. Many voluntourism trips come with hefty price tags and they can vary a lot. For two weeks' volunteering in India, excluding flights, we found that prices ranged from about $300 up to more than $2000 when booked with a different organisation.

And what do you get for that? Of the organisations from which we obtained fee breakdowns, about half the volunteer fee went towards direct in-country living costs and projects, while the other half is spent on general administration, organising placements, implementation and monitoring of projects, volunteer recruitment and presumably some profit for companies. But each company breaks down its costs differently, making it hard to know exactly how your money is spent. And given that many voluntourism companies operate in an international environment, and Australian companies with an annual turnover of less than $25m generally aren't required to submit financials to the corporate regulator, details on company profits simply aren't often available.

Volunteer travel providers should be transparent about how consumer fees are spent

We believe volunteer travel providers should be transparent about how fees are spent so that consumers can make meaningful comparisons.

Turning commercial

The objectives and motivations for commercial businesses in the voluntourism sector are very different from non-commercial organisations, which Wearing argues is a problem. While good for-profit organisations do exist, he recommends going with an NGO as they tend to have projects that are better organised and also benefit the community.

The project's location is also helpful in deciphering how commercial it is likely to be. Stay away from popular tourist destinations. "If it's already a popular destination, really it's just mass tourism," says Wearing.

Various companies also show signs of their commercial bent by offering expensive optional extras such as language classes. Projects Abroad, for example, charges $2495 for two weeks

THE RIGHT STUFF

- **Do your homework before you go** Don't assume all organisations are good simply because they offer volunteer projects trying to making a difference. It's not hard for unscrupulous and misguided operators to start up.
- **Ask to speak with previous volunteers**, preferably someone who's been recently.
- **Steer clear of popular tourist destinations**.
- **Go with a company that's directly engaged with projects** rather than a company that outsources

caregivers on child development. Wherever possible, family and community-based care is a better alternative.

If you're thinking about volunteering in an orphanage, it's worth considering the guidelines as laid out at thinkchildsafe.org. Well-run orphanages do exist but should always been seen as a last resort, and longer-term commitments, such as nine to 12 months, from volunteers are recommended.

of Spanish classes at its schools in Argentina and Mexico, yet there are endless numbers of local alternatives providing a much less expensive rate. (You can also take Spanish classes in Australia at a university or community college before you go for less.)

Other companies offer projects with dubious benefit, which are closer to tourism than volunteering. UK-based travel company, Gapforce, offers a volunteer opportunity to "rehabilitate and care for domesticated elephants" in a Thai elephant camp. Volunteers are able to ride the elephants, a practice that concerns animal welfare groups and tour operators such as Intrepid Travel.

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

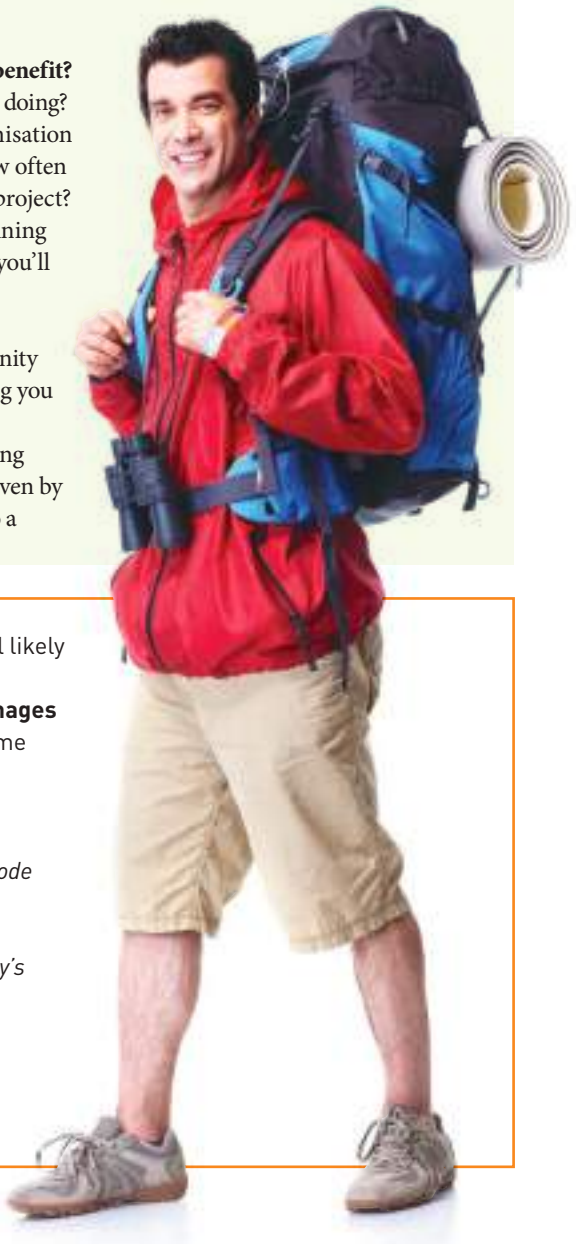
Questions to ask

Where does your money go?

- Is it an NGO or for-profit?
- What's the specific breakdown of your volunteer fee? Are they transparent about this? How much goes towards your in- country living costs and the project compared with administration, project implementation and monitoring, volunteer recruitment and advertising?
- What's included with your fee? Insurance, 24-hour emergency contact, ground transport, flights, on-site staff, security?

What is the organisational involvement and community benefit?

- Exactly what work will you be doing?
- Has someone from the organisation been to visit the project? How often are they in contact with the project?
- How long have they been running volunteer trips to the project you'll be going to?
- Do they have an ongoing relationship with the community or are they simply outsourcing you to a local partner?
- Why is the work you'll be doing critical to the project? Is it driven by local interests? Does it fit into a longer-term development plan?
- Does the project promote self-sufficiency? Is it designed with an exit strategy?
- How does the company advertise the trip? Does it use "poverty marketing" to attract business rather than respect people's dignity? Do they oversell it or are they realistic about your contribution?
- Is pre-trip cultural training provided?
- What monitoring mechanisms are in place to ensure the project continues to be useful? ■



its volunteer opportunities to a local partner.

- **NGOs and not-for-profits** are more likely to have more useful projects.
- **Find out exactly what work you will be doing before you go** to ensure that projects are actually in place.
- **Steer clear of skills-based projects (such as teaching English) unless you have those skills**. Manual labour projects often provide something the community wouldn't otherwise have the time to do.
- **Wait until you arrive to book any optional extras** like language classes or side trips as they'll likely cost less.
- **Avoid volunteering at orphanages** unless you have significant time to commit.
- **Read the responsible volunteering guidelines** for tour operators: *Comhlámh's Code of Good Practice for Volunteer Sending Agencies* and *The International Ecotourism Society's International Voluntourism Guidelines for Commercial Tour Operators*
- Take a look at the checklist of questions above.

Hobson's choice

Jodi Bird uncovers why your car insurance policy's "choice of repairer" is often no choice at all

Having the option to choose your own car repairer is one of CHOICE's benchmarks for recommending a car insurance policy (see *CHOICE*, Mar 13). But your choice may be trumped by the insurer who, thanks to a qualification buried in the fine print of your policy, can force you to take your car to one of its partner repairers if that repairer comes in with a lower quote. And, it can then be difficult to know whether the preferred repairer will do a good or slapdash job on your wheels (see opposite).

Shonky repairers

In mid-November last year, the NSW government announced an inquiry into the links between car insurers and smash repairers. This was in response to concerns that shonky repairers were getting the jobs and poor repairs were not being reported to NSW Fair Trading.

The Motor Traders' Association of NSW (MTA NSW), an industry body representing car repairers, has welcomed the inquiry, as have some insurers. The association told us it received 110 complaints over 18 months from consumers frustrated by shoddy insurance repair work organised by insurers, and that few of these cases are reported to NSW Fair Trading by insurers. Consumers' hands are tied because it is the insurer who authorises the repairs, so it is up to the insurer to report poor-quality repairs to NSW Fair Trading.

According to the MTA NSW, insurers routinely pay repairers outside their preferred network to rectify the original repairs in cases where policyholders complain. But they keep the contract with the insurer's preferred repairer. Presumably, the cost of fixing work, in the few instances where a consumer is aware of the shonky repairs, is offset by the saving of using preferred repairers.

Two-quote system

To cut costs, insurers operate networks of "preferred smash repairers" who may be required to complete a volume of work for a fixed price, even though many

WHAT WE WANT
THE MTA NSW AND CHOICE RECOMMEND:
• Insurers report poor-quality repairs to their Fair Trading office
• Fair Trading departments establish a name-and-shame list for shonky repairers

consumers prefer to choose their own repairer. In our most recent CHOICE member car insurance survey, 84% of respondents rated choice of repairer as a very or fairly important feature.

In many cases insurers use a "two-quote" system. For policies that don't offer a choice of repairer, the insurer collects quotes from two preferred repairers. For those that do offer a choice, the consumer gets a quote from their own repairer but, for some insurers, if the preferred repairer quotes less they will be given the work – something a consumer can't argue against because it's a condition of the policy they've signed.

And the insurers put pressure on their own preferred repairers to quote low. Some preferred smash repairer contracts, for instance, require repairers to win the jobs for 50% of the quotes they write. The MTA says this drives the practice of quoting low to get the job instead of quoting to achieve an acceptable standard of repair.

What the insurers say

Major car insurer Suncorp told CHOICE the inquiry comes at an appropriate time because there is a need for change in the smash repair industry. There were once only 10 car models in Australia, which were made from one type of steel; now there are more than 160 models with seven different types of steel, and some vehicles with 70 central processing units.

The Suncorp group, which owns AAMI, GIO, Apia and Bingle, are part owners of smash repairers Capital Smart and Q Plus. Capital Smart operates conveyor belt-style minor repairs services that allow consumers to drop off their car and pick up the repaired vehicle the next day. Suncorp says its relationship with Capital Smart saves it up to $400 on each car repaired. Q Plus specialises in "heavy hit" structural repairs and is expected to repair 150 cars a week at full capacity.

Suncorp's public policy manager, Duncan Bone, told us such streamlined shops are the way of the future. He disputes the MTA's assertion that insurer-run shops have higher correction rates than independent repairers.

"They think it's unconscionable that we're involved in the process and are defining what's happening in their industry. In many ways we are, but we believe the innovative repairers we've invested in, the national repairer standard we are creating and the training support we provide to our recommended repairers are benefitting consumers and consumer safety."

The MTA argues that there is a conflict of interest because all parties involved in the claims process – the assessor, repairer and claims worker – are ultimately employed by the insurer, although Suncorp counter-argues its lifetime guarantee guards against poor repairs.

Bone also contends that Suncorp brands offering choice of repairer do not use the two-quote system and 99% of insurance customers who've opted for a choice of repairer policy end up using that repairer, although the insurer may negotiate the price if the quote is too high or includes work not caused by the accident.

Given the nature of the ties between many insurers and their preferred repairers, it seems "choice of repairer" is a policy feature that may work much better in theory than in practice. ■

SHODDINESS IN ACTION

Examples of shonky repairs done by insurer-preferred repairers range from poor workmanship – such as brackets held in place by pop rivets – to outright deception.

The recommended repairer for this Range Rover quoted to remove and replace a structural part of the body. Instead the smash repairer cut the part, but did not replace it.

Luckily the car's owner, a former employee at the insurance company, avoided the rigmarole of rectifying the shoddy repair work by calling in a favour from his former employer and took the agreed value of the Range Rover in cash. The car has since been written off.

The shonky repairer was not reported to NSW Fair Trading and was free to return to work on the insurer's jobs.

The repairer tried a dubious fix on this Range Rover

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

THE CHECKOUT IS BACK!

Catch CHOICE's guilty mum **Kate Browne** alongside **Julian Morrow** and **Craig Reucassel** (*The Chaser's War on Everything*, *The Hamster Wheel*), **Kirsten Drysdale** (*Hungry Beast*) and emerging writer/performers Zoe Norton Lodge, Ben Jenkins, Scott Abbot and Richard Cooke as *The Checkout* returns.

The new season offers 20 episodes – twice as many as the first season!
New segments include:

- A consumer-friendly guide to the meaning of marketer-friendly terms such as "fresh", "Australian made" and many more
- An annoyingly detailed look at the Australian Consumer Law and how you can use it to your advantage in real-world situations
- A look at health products and miracle cures – do they really do what they say? (Hint: no)

THE CHECKOUT

Thursdays 8pm ABC1 on a TV near you

Home truths

Builder's or home warranty insurance has long been a losing prospect for homeowners, with little improvement in sight, as **Andy Kollmorgen** explains

Home warranty insurance is supposed to protect homeowners from incompetent builders. Unfortunately, it doesn't do much to protect against unscrupulous ones.

In every state except Tasmania, builders are required to take out the insurance for contracts of $12,000 or more (or $20,000 in NSW and WA). The premiums are then added to the homeowner's costs. To cover a newly built home in NSW you'll end up paying about $1900. But it's generally not money well spent.

The idea with this insurance product is that you can have construction mistakes fixed or get your money back if you lodge a legitimate claim. The tricky part is that every state (except Queensland) operates a "last-resort" model – you can only claim if the builder goes broke, dies or disappears.

If the builder simply refuses to repair the shoddy work or return your money, your only option is to take them to the consumer affairs tribunal in your state, which can be a lengthy and difficult process. And if your builder *does* go broke, dies or disappears before the complaint is resolved and you're forced to resort to your home warranty insurance, it won't cover legal costs against the builder, which can easily exceed the amount you're attempting to recover. (In one case cited by the Consumer Action Law Centre, a claim for $63,000 incurred about $90,000 in legal fees.)

CHOICE called for an overhaul of home warranty insurance schemes in a submission to a Senate Economics Committee review in 2008, one of the many government inquiries into this issue over the years. But last-resort cover remains a raw deal for consumers, with Victorian residents particularly vulnerable.

$1000

The maximum value of residential building work that can be done in NSW without a licence, including labour and materials

$20,000

The maximum cost of residential building work, including labour and materials, which can be done in NSW without having to obtain home warranty insurance

Outrageous claims

The Victorian Managed Insurance Authority has reported that Victorian homeowners paid about $87.8m in warranty insurance premiums from May 2010 to May 2011, but only $108,000 was paid out on a total of three successful claims. And yet, about 250,000 Victorians suffered damage at the hands of the building industry in 2010.

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

Some homeowners have begun their own campaign to change the existing system. According to the Building Compliance Reform Association (BCRA), a fledgling consumer group set up to improve protections in Victoria, less than one per cent of policyholders meet the criteria for making a claim, and the rare successful claim isn't likely to cover your losses.

The BCRA says insurers in Victoria typically offer a pittance of what's asked for, such as $17,500 for a $900,000 claim. Victorians can take their insurer to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) to challenge the payout, but the insurer will likely prolong the process and you won't be covered for these legal costs.

Builder bungles

One disaffected homeowner, Beverly Loyson, told us her experience with home warranty insurance had led to "extreme emotional and financial damage" for her and many others in her predicament.

Loyson's suppliers and installers refused to come back and re-do work that had been deemed defective by the Victorian Building Commission (VBC, now known as the Victorian Building Authority or VBA), saying they would only take orders from the builder who'd hired them. The problem was that the builder had gone out of business, owing the Loysons $80,000 in

FINDING A TRUSTWORTHY BUILDER

Because licensing is no guarantee of reliability or accountability, the best way to find a builder is through personal references from people you trust. It's also important to know that the builder will probably be outsourcing the actual hands-on work to tradespeople, some of whom will be more skilled than others. Unscrupulous builders may skimp on materials, hire low-cost tradespeople and keep a disproportionate share of the contract price for themselves. Once you get a trustworthy recommendation, don't be afraid to ask a few pointed questions.

- **Can the builder provide homeowner contact details for other recently completed projects?** Talk to previous customers and ask whether there were any disputes about the quality of the work and materials, completion deadlines or unexpected costs.
- **Who will be doing the actual work?** Are the tradespeople licensed? Ask for their names and verify by checking the public register in your state or territory.
- **If the builder's licence says "only for contracts not requiring home warranty insurance" on the public register, it means the builder has not yet been approved by an insurer** and can't offer home warranty insurance.
- **The builder's name on the insurance certificate should match the name on the building contract and the builder's licence**, otherwise the insurer likely won't honour a claim.
- **The Building Compliance Reform Association website (bcra.asn.au)** provides a search function that lets you check whether builders in its database have a dodgy track record.

$87.8m

Total home warranty insurance premiums paid by Victorians in 2010-2011

$108,000

Total payout for successful claims*

promised refunds and hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of needed repairs. Her home warranty insurance payout wasn't nearly enough to undo the damage the builder had done to her home, but she didn't have the resources to challenge the insurer in court.

Loyson later found out the builder was involved in a VCAT proceeding at the time he quoted for the job and had numerous complaints and a successful warranty claim on the record against him. According to Loyson, these facts were known to the VBC, the VCAT and the insurance company that approved the builder's warranty insurance – but not to her.

"Many families have been financially and emotionally damaged by greedy insurers who put aside the evidence of incompetence and deliberately put families at risk," Loyson told CHOICE. "Consumers are blocked from accessing the information they need to avoid builders with a poor track record."

The builder liquidated his business with a sizable unpaid claim against him but, according to Loyson, sold his house two years later for a tidy sum. "Builders move their assets into other family members' names or trusts so their futures are safe and secure," she says. "Homeowners and their life savings are just collateral damage, yet nobody seems to care as long as the building industry keeps going."

Also known as...

Home warranty insurance goes by many names:

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK | SOURCE: ESTIMATED BY VMIA

Regulatory breakdown

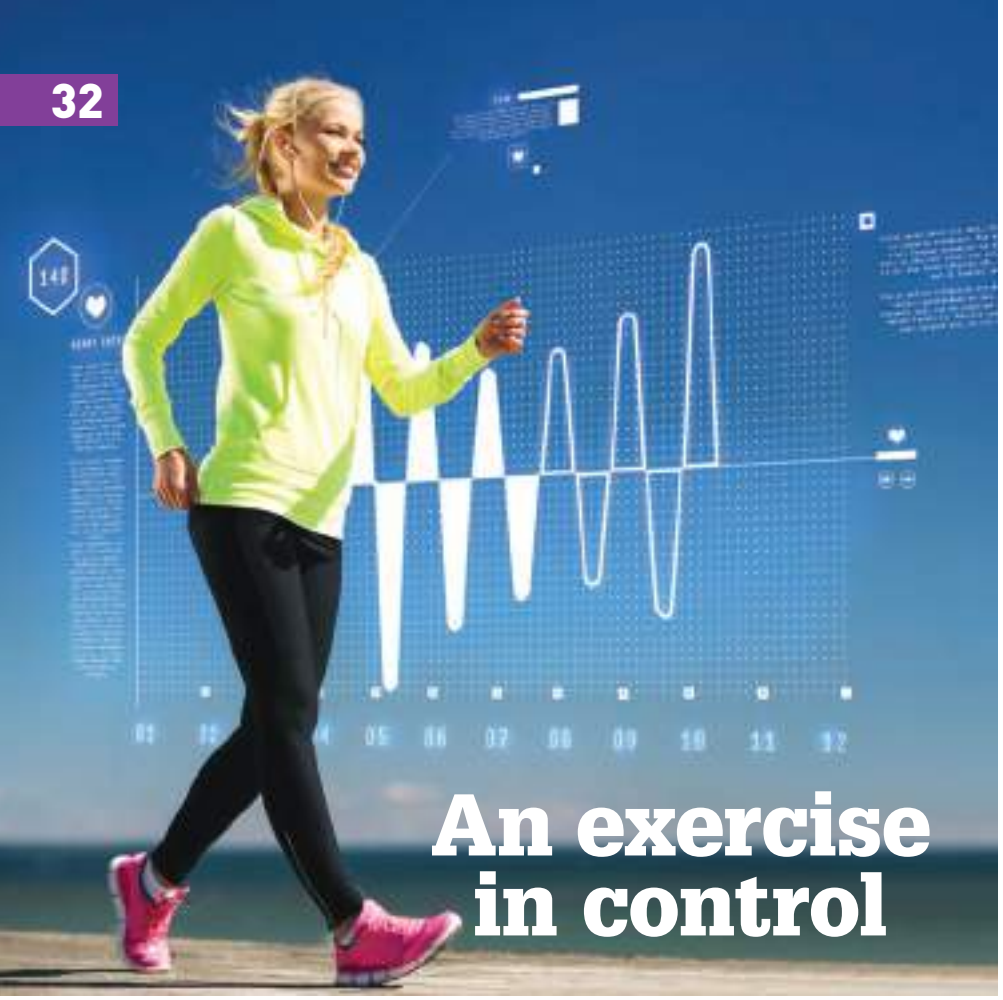
There's plenty of evidence to suggest the regulatory system in Victoria has broken down and that bad builders can easily slip through the cracks. A December 2012 Victorian Ombudsman report painted a grim picture of the VBA's operating procedures, saying oversight of builders was spotty at best and that the organisation had squandered substantial taxpayer dollars on hospitality, entertainment and travel, as well as engaged in widespread cronyism and other dodgy practices. The report concluded that the VBA's Commission's Practitioners Board, which oversees professional standards, "cannot state with any confidence that only competent and suitably qualified and experienced practitioners have been registered to build in Victoria".

This comes as no surprise to BCRA secretary Anne Paten, who's convinced much of the building industry in Victoria is corrupt and that regulators, insurance companies and the VBA itself are teamed up against homeowners. "The builders and the regulators play golf together, they eat lunch together, and they were behind the design of this system together," she says. "Everybody involved in the dispute resolution process – the builder, the insurance company, and the tribunal – all know each other and support each other's interests. The homeowner is left out in the cold." In April 2012, it emerged that the VBC had hired corporate boxes at AFL and Australian Open tennis events and invited construction industry executives to attend.

Paten says her builder made major errors that called for extensive structural repairs. But when she demanded rectification, the builder told her he wouldn't be fixing anything and that she could take her case to VCAT. That's a no-win prospect for homeowners, Paten says, since the builder's legal team can draw out the process as long as possible. "Everybody's on the builder's team, and it's all about delaying and adjourning and sending you broke."

Paten became involved with the BCRA as a result of her bad experience, and says her research on behalf of the start-up has led her to conclude that about half the licensed builders in Australia are "cowboys" who shouldn't have been licensed or insured and can't be trusted.

A shakeup following the ombudsman's and other critical reports resulted in the VBC being replaced by the VBA last July, a move billed as a reform measure. But in the BCRA's view, the name change is little more than window dressing. ■



An exercise in control

Can gadgets and apps help you stick to a fitness plan? **Zoya Sheftalovich** runs through your options

Three months ago you committed to joining a gym, changing your eating habits and maybe even getting more sleep. A few months later, and you're slipping off the wagon and back into your old ways, so if your willpower isn't up to the job, will a fitness tracker help keep you on track?

Word on diets

Keeping up a healthy routine can be difficult once the motivation of swimsuit season subsides and temptation gets the better of us. The oft-quoted statistics on the sustainability of dieting, for example, are grim: about 80% of those who lose weight won't be able to keep it off in the long term.

In fact, one large-scale review of the long-term outcomes of calorie-restricting diets found up to two-thirds of dieters regain more weight than they lost. According to the authors, "dieters were not able to maintain their weight losses in the long term… It appears that dieters who manage to sustain a weight loss are the rare exception, rather than the rule. Dieters who gain back more weight than they lost may very well be the norm, rather than an unlucky minority."

20%

Approximate percentage of dieters who manage to keep weight off in the long term

Dr Rick Kausman, a medical doctor specialising in healthy weight management, says people are doomed to fail if their sole focus is on counting calories. "We need to take the focus off weight loss, and [put it] onto healthy behaviours and healthy thinking," Kausman says.

Focusing on fitness

Kausman argues the main focus should be on general fitness. "Fitness is a much stronger measure of health than a person's weight. People who happen to be a lower weight may well be unhealthy if they're not doing any activity or are smoking. Human beings come in a range of shapes and sizes, and we want people to take care of themselves, rather than focus on a number on a scale."

So rather than looking at a short-term diet to shed those extra kilos, a long-term and holistic lifestyle change is a much better bet.

And that's where gadgets can step in.

Go, go gadget!

There's a whole market out there for gadgets designed to get you moving. While they can be useful, Kausman warns against getting too hard-core.

"For some people, a gadget that raises awareness of a lack of activity and helps them work on that can be useful," he says. But if they're using a monitor to push them to do more activity than is sustainable, that's going to make them feel like they've failed when they falter."

FITBIT

Fitbit.com/au
Price: Zip – $79.95; One and Flex – $129.95; Aria Wi-Fi Smart Scale – $169.95

Fitbit has become something of a fitness ecosystem. The company sells wearable activity trackers (worn around the wrist or on clothing) that can be linked to your mobile app, and an

GET SOCIAL

Kicking your health goals can be as simple as using social media – one recent study found Twitter can help. Participants who received weight loss tweets from advisers and used the social media platform to share information and provide support to others lost more weight than those who didn't.

A BIT RASH

Wearable fitness gadgets can be unhealthy. In January, US consumers reported suffering a rash allegedly caused by Fitbit Force (not available in Australia). The company argued in *The Consumerist* that it was aware of reports, but "numerous factors could cause a skin irritation" or "reactions to bacteria that can accumulate in wristbands".

optional $170-ish smart scale. Fitbit devices can also be linked to MyFitnessPal and other third-party apps. The idea is to seamlessly integrate the Fitbit into your life and track (almost) all your bodily functions, including exercise, sleep and diet. The activity trackers, which in Australia include the wristband-style Flex and the pedometer-like Zip and One, havea silent alarm that vibrates you awake, a display screen, stair tracker, sleep tracker and distance tracker.

CHOICE staffer Matthew is a fan of his Fitbit One; he likes that it's light and can be attached to anything or carried in a pocket. There is, however, room for improvement when it comes to the practicalities of the gadget. While it is sweat, rain and splash proof, Matthew points out that "it's not washing machine resistant. I've killed two now."

For more on exercise trackers, see page 70

JAWBONE UP

jawbone.com/up
Price: from $129
Similar to the Fitbit, the Jawbone Up is a rubber wristband designed to be worn at all times to track activity, sleep and diet.

Sarah Davies used the Up for a couple of months, but lost it when it fell off her wrist – a potential design flaw of the wrap-around style. She found it somewhat useful, but says it isn't for everyone. "Consider how you'll use the data you get out of it. If you like gadgets and stats it's pretty cool. But I'm not sure how helpful it is in real-life terms. The downside is it made me more anxious about my sleep patterns rather than less, because suddenly I knew how many times I was waking up in one night."

NIKE+ FUEL BAND

nikeplus.nike.com
Price: from $179
The FuelBand is all about physical activity. It keeps track of your exertions by converting exercise into "NikeFuel" points. You set how many points you want to collect every day based on your fitness goals, and the band transitions from red to green to "Goal" as you go about racking them up. The band links up with your smartphone, and you can connect to a network of other users and set each other challenges.

Appy figures

Fitness apps for your smartphone can be a good way of keeping an eye on your fitness progress. The options are endless, but include MyFitnessPal, MapMyFitness, Gymprovise, RunningMap Trackometer, Couch-to-5K, MapMyRun and CalorieKing, among others.

Dr Kausman says some apps can be useful, but only if they're sustainable in the long term. "An app that just encourages people to write down everything they eat isn't going to be helpful because the focus is on the wrong thing and people will get bored. The focus should be on being mindful about eating, and maintaining sustainable fitness goals."

MyFitnessPal, available free for Apple and Android, is an app that has some of our members convinced. It allows you to keep track of your activity and the food you're eating (it claims to have a database of over three million foods), and can sync with your Fitbit device (see above). The app analyses the nutritional value of the food you've consumed, and highlights any nutritional imbalances, such as consuming too much saturated fat, for example. You can also set goals for exercise and weight loss, and track your progress against them.

The similarly well-equipped **CalorieKing** is an Australian-based app, meaning it has access to lots of local food and takeaway options. However, it's only available on the Apple iOS, and costs $5.99.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

If you're in the market for a wearable fitness gadget, the options can be overwhelming. Here's a checklist of what to look for before you make your choice.

Does it have a display? The instant gratification of seeing how far you've travelled can be motivating.

How bulky is it? For those who are used to wearing slim watch bands, a bulky gadget can take some getting used to.

How much do you want it to track? The more complex the gadget, the more effort required.

How sustainable are the goals in the long term?

Check with your doctor before embarking on a fitness regime. ■

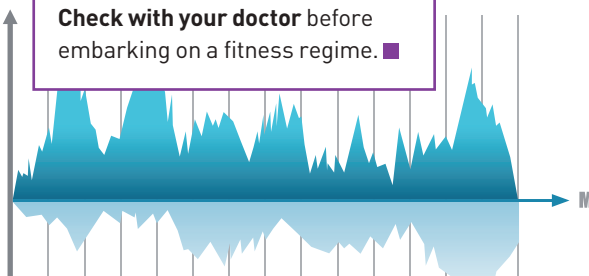
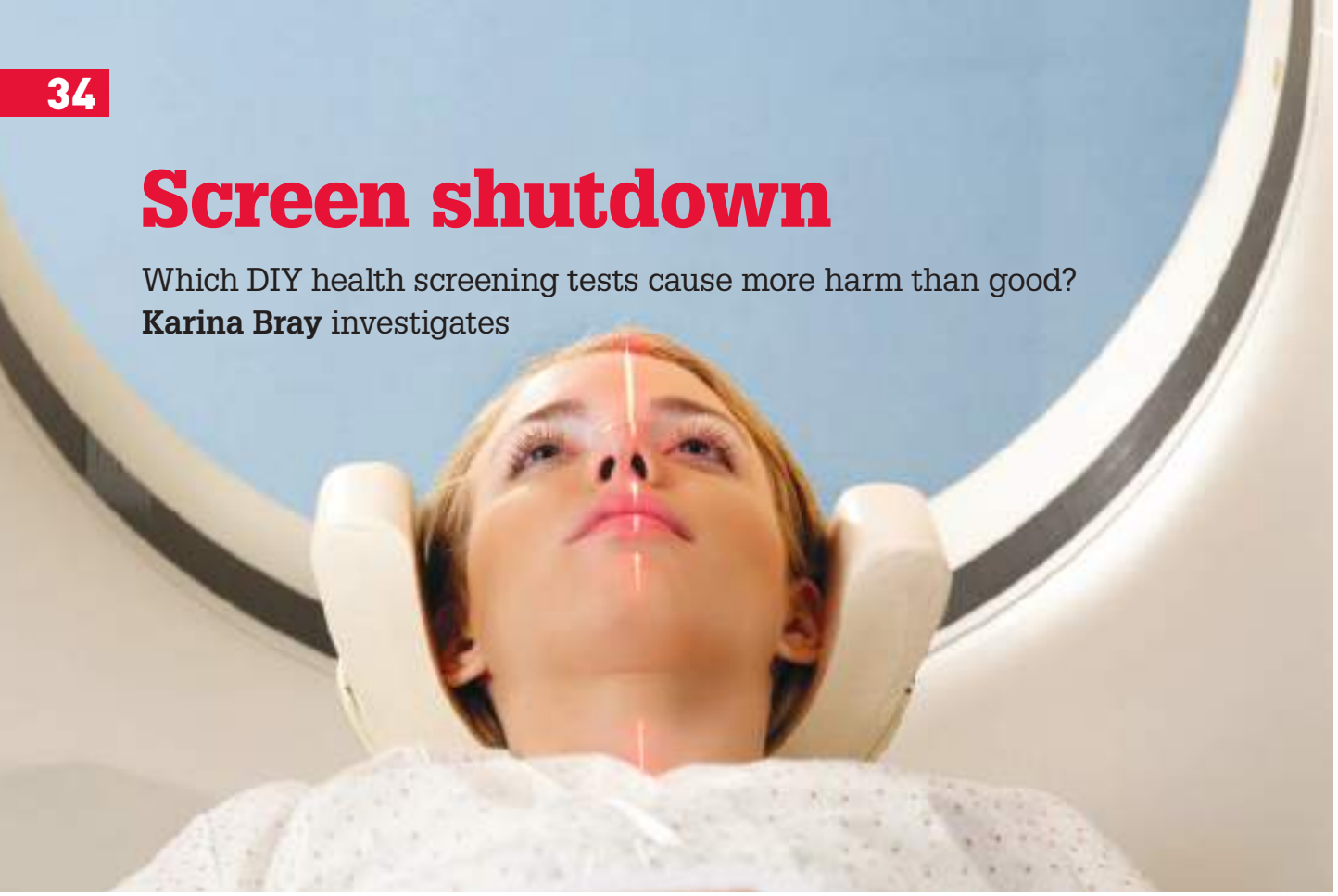


IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK



Screen shutdown

Which DIY health screening tests cause more harm than good? **Karina Bray** investigates

When it comes to your health, some screens are harder to see through than others. There are various government-funded targeted screenings and tests recommended for people at various ages and life stages, as well as general health indicators such as blood pressure, blood sugar and blood cholesterol levels. The tests funded by the government are those for which the health benefits for Australians and our health system cost savings are calculated to outweigh the costs of supplying the tests.

But advancements in medical technology and reduced cost of equipment have seen many common diagnostic procedures and technologies being turned to screening for diseases and conditions in people without any symptoms. By offering these services directly to consumers, the companies can bypass doctors and other health professionals. While applauding this proactive approach to health, many medical professionals are concerned about the outcomes of the tests.

The main problem with such screening is that it may provide false reassurance that there are no problems, with implied permission to carry on as normal, even if that includes risky lifestyle and behaviours. Or, it may find something suspicious, which will be followed up by invasive testing, accompanied by stress and anxiety that turns out to be unfounded.

By offering [screening] services directly to consumers, companies can bypass their doctors

Here we outline the issues with some of these direct-to-consumer screening services.

Full-body CT scans

Popular in the early 2000s, full-body CT scans were promoted to people without any symptoms of illness or disease risk factors. Thanks to increased regulation they're less common now, but are still around and also available overseas to medical tourists. Depending on the country, providers may be less well-regulated than their Australian counterparts, so local government and health authorities continue to warn against them.

Said to be able to detect early signs of diseases such as cancer and cardiovascular disease, full-body CT

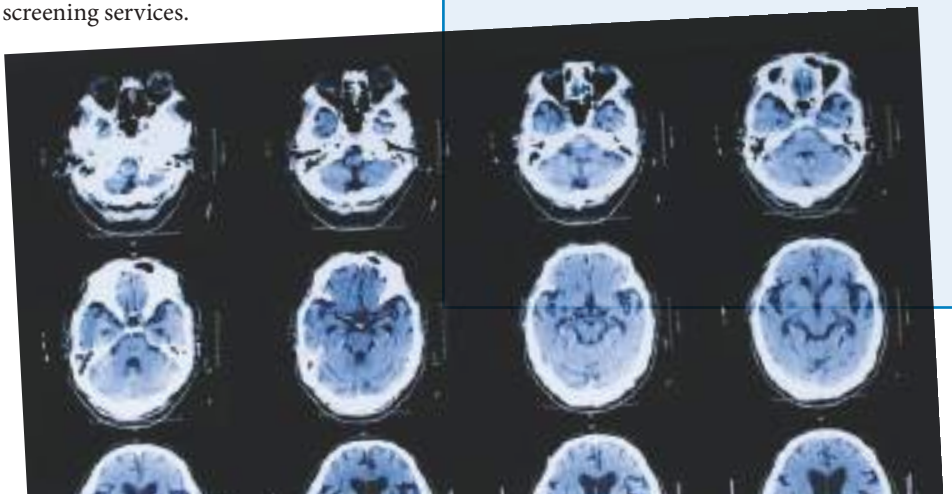


IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

SCREEN FOR LIFE

A private company called Screen For Life sends letters to people in their fifties, offering cardiovascular ultrasound screening. With its tagline, "prevention for peace of mind", Screen For Life argues their ultrasound can detect potential risk factors for stroke, heart attack and aneurysm, allowing you to take preventative action – or else give you the all-clear and therefore peace of mind. A package of four screenings costs $199 (not covered by Medicare or private health insurance).

The screenings have undoubtedly helped some people who were able to take action to prevent a serious health event. However, critics point out that while there's no harm (apart from the cost), it can provide false reassurance or cause unnecessary alarm.

And there's little evidence such screening reduces the risk of stroke. For example, one test is a scan of the carotid arteries in the neck, where plaque deposits can stiffen and clog arteries, leading to stroke. But health experts point out that many people have evidence of hardening arteries without an increased risk of stroke. It could also provide false reassurance, leading people to think they have no risk factors and continue unhealthy lifestyle habits.

Scan For Life says the service is conducted by appropriate health professionals, but it has been criticised for taking place in settings that aren't under control of a registered health organisation, such as RSLs. The National Stroke Foundation stresses that it has no links with Screen for Life, saying it doesn't recommend unnecessary tests and that if you have concerns to see your GP.

scan advocates claim the diseases can be treated more effectively if discovered early. And studies have found that rate of cancers among apparently healthy people who request full-body scans is about two to five per cent – so that small percentage of people is theoretically better off having had the scan.

However:

- For someone lacking signs or symptoms of disease, it's unlikely to detect a serious disease early enough to treat it and alter the outcome significantly.
- CT scans can return suspicious findings that turn out to be harmless – for example, scar tissue from an old infection, calcifications, cysts and nodules. Doctors have even coined the term "incidentalomas" for benign lesions found incidentally through scanning when there are no symptoms or other suspicions. Meanwhile, the patient undergoes more invasive and expensive testing, suffering the fear and anxiety that accompanies the threat of a potentially serious problem.
- Exposure to radiation during a full-body CT scan is about 500 times that of a chest X-ray. This is associated with a small increase in risk of cancer.
- Full-body scans may also miss hidden cancers, wrongly leading the patient to think everything is fine and that they don't need to see their doctor or have other specific screening tests (mammograms, bowel and prostate cancer screening, for example).
- They're expensive, and aren't covered by Medicare or private health insurance.

CT scans are a useful diagnostic tool for cancers, and when used in targeted areas, the radiation risks are outweighed by the potential benefits of treatment. But for the "worried well", the risks outweigh any benefits.

DEXA scan

The newish kid on the screening block is DEXA (dual energy X-ray absorptiometry) body scans. A DEXA scanner produces two X-ray beams, one with high and one with low energy. They pass through bone to different degrees, allowing bone density to be measured.

While used for a long time for measuring bone density and risk of osteoporosis, clinics now offer it for measuring body composition (muscle and body fat) too. In particular, they're targeting bodybuilders and people trying to improve their health or fitness by measuring actual changes in body composition, which can help people determine whether their particular exercise program is having the desired effect. Some offer the services of an exercise physiologist as well.

You don't need a doctor's referral for a DEXA body composition scan, and it's not covered by Medicare, although your private health insurer may cover a consultation with an exercise physiologist.

Genetic testing

There are many legitimate uses of genetic testing, which traditionally has been carried out through a private doctor or the public hospital system. Medical genetic testing usually requires referral from a medical practitioner as well as pre- and post-test counselling, and the majority of tests occur through the public hospital system with geneticists and counsellors on hand. The patient must have the purpose of the test and the implications for themselves and their family explained, and provide informed consent. Medicare covers the cost of some genetic tests.

Genetic testing can be used to predict an individual's risk of disease when there is a family history of it. An example is the BRCA1 or BRCA2 gene mutations that indicate increased risk of breast and ovarian cancer, allowing potential action such as more frequent screening (mammograms) or risk reduction surgery (such as a preventative double mastectomy). The testing can also be used to predict treatment response – for example, certain gene mutations in forms of cancer (breast, colon and melanoma) indicate susceptibility to particular treatment drugs. These drugs may be expensive or have undesirable side effects and shouldn't be used when patients aren't likely to benefit.

Now consumers can undertake their own testing by buying kits online, providing a DNA sample from the comfort of their own home, posting it off to a lab and finding out all manner of genetic information, such as ancestry, genetic quirks or talents and health information.

It's this direct-to-consumer genetic testing, which bypasses the normal checks and balances of the health system testing, that's raising concerns:

- Companies doing testing may be located offshore and not follow the same stringent test procedures and analysis of Australian laboratories. This may mean inaccurate, unclear or misleading results.
- GPs are under no obligation to interpret, accept or act upon results of these genetic tests. If they're inaccurate, unclear or misleading, the GP is liable to medico-legal risks.
- There may also be privacy issues, where privacy laws in other countries are different to our own.
- Genes don't tell the whole story. Even if you have a genetic predisposition to certain health problems, such as type 2 diabetes or obesity, your lifestyle can determine whether genes get to act.
- Only a small fraction of the genetic contribution to common diseases has been identified, so a genetic profile won't give you the big picture.
- Information you discover may also affect family members, so consider the implications.
- If you have a predictive genetic test or a test for a condition or disease for which you have no symptoms, you have a duty to inform life insurers if applying for a new policy or changing an existing one.

The Human Genetics Society of Australasia encourages consumers considering this type of testing to discuss it with their healthcare provider, consider the potential negatives and, should they decide to go ahead, choose a test provider that abides by practical and ethical principles based on best practice. You can find out more at hgsa.com.au

Screening in the mainstream

These mainstream screening tests are recommended for the relevant people.

✓ **Prostate cancer: PSA and rectal examination**
Some recommend once a year for men aged 50-70. But this is controversial, and health professionals recommend you speak to your doctor about the risks and benefits of screening.

✓ **Breast cancer: mammogram**
Recommended every two years for women aged 50-74.

✓ **Bowel cancer: faecal occult blood test**
Provided by the government for people aged 50, 55, 60 and 65.

✓ **Osteoporosis: bone mineral density (BMD) scan**
Recommended for women at the start of menopause, after menopause and for men on medical advice (based on risk).

✓ **Cervical cancer: Pap smear**
Recommended every two years for women over 18 who've ever had sex.

Other screening tests

- Blood pressure test for hypertension
- Blood lipid screening for cholesterol and triglycerides
- Blood glucose test for type 2 diabetes
- Vision and eye health, including cataracts (a clouding of the lens), macular degeneration (degeneration of the macula, the very central area of the retina) and glaucoma (a group of diseases where the optic nerve is gradually destroyed). ■

Extra-ordinary?

Your extras health cover may be falling short. **Uta Mihm** explains how to maximise your benefits

Private health insurance is increasingly putting Australians' financial health at risk. This year premiums have gone up on average by 6.2%, which you may have seen in your latest renewal notice. Worse, the premium hikes come hot on the heels of reduced rebates for high-income earners.

Extras insurance works differently to other types of insurance. Where hospital, home and car insurance cover you for unexpected events that may otherwise cost you thousands, extras insurance works more like a budgeting tool. It's meant to help with smaller ongoing costs, such as a dental check-up or a new pair of glasses. But how much does it really help?

If your current cover includes extras and you want to reduce the premium pain, take a close look at whether the benefits for services such as dental and optical outweigh the costs. While dropping private hospital insurance can mean paying extra tax and higher premiums should you take it up again, these penalties don't apply to extras insurance.

Value for money?

Extras insurance rarely covers the full cost of your treatment. On average, health insurers pay about half the cost for dental and optical services, a third for medicines not covered by the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, and a quarter for hearing aids (see page 38).

And there are wide variations between funds and policies, too. The most generous insurer for dental (for example) refunded 60% on average in 2011/12, while the most miserly covered just 32%.

So does extras insurance offer value for money? The 1000-plus respondents to a survey we conducted late last year were divided on this question. While 43% considered extras good or very good value for money, about a third were undecided and 26% thought extras were a poor or very poor deal.

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

WORK IT OUT

The average extras benefit per person in the year to September 2013 was about $350. Premiums for CHOICE Best Buys in 2013 for singles ranged between $190 for budget policies to $670 for top cover if you receive the full 30% rebate (see *CHOICE*, Jun 13). In other words, many people are paying more in premiums than they receive in benefits.

To work out if your extras insurance is offering you value for money:

- **Request an annual claims statement**, which shows the total benefits you received in the last financial year.
- **Compare the total benefit with your annual premium**.
- **If, like many people, you have a combined extras and hospital policy, a bit of maths will come in handy**. Select a standalone hospital insurance policy from your fund that's comparable to the hospital cover in your combined policy (with the same excess and cover level), then deduct its price from the premium you pay. The difference will be the amount you pay for extras. Compare this premium with your extras benefits. Are you paying more than you're getting in return? The best place to find out about your policies is privatehealth.gov.au

If you find your premium is substantially higher than the benefits you receive and you don't anticipate your health needs will change anytime soon, consider switching to a less expensive policy or cancelling extras altogether. But note you'll be subjected to waiting periods before you can make a claim if you take up extras again.

Tip Health insurers often have specials that allow new members to claim straight away for many services (although usually not the more expensive ones).

Average claim & payout for health extras

DENTAL
Claim $115
Payout $58

OPTICAL
Claim $121
Payout $65

CHIROPRACTIC
Claim $54
Payout $26

PHARMACY (non-PBS medicines)
Claim $79
Payout $28

PHYSIOTHERAPY
Claim $61
Payout $30

NATURAL THERAPIES
Claim $60
Payout $26

PODIATRY
Claim $70
Payout $36

HEARING AIDS
Claim $1899
Payout $501

ALL EXTRAS
Claim $96
Payout $48

These are average claim and payout for each service. There are wide variations between type of service, such as general and major dental, funds, states and policies. "All extras" total includes a number of other services on top of those mentioned. *Source*: PHIAC, June 2012.

WHAT'S THE RIGHT POLICY FOR YOU?

There are three levels of extras cover:

- **Basic** – suited to healthy singles and couples
- **Medium** – cover for families with young children and middle-aged singles and couples with average health care needs
- **Top** – designed for families with school-aged children and mature singles and couples with high health care needs

The biggest difference among insurers is for dental cover – both the range of services and the maximum benefit offered. More than 50% of all benefits paid by extras insurers are for dental treatments.

- If you only need general dental, such as check-ups, cleaning or a filling, a basic policy will likely be good value.
- Major dental prodedures such as bridges or crowns are normally covered by a medium- or top-cover policy.
- If your children need braces or you or your partner needs dentures, a top-cover policy may suit you best.

Other differences between basic, medium and top cover are:

- **Higher limits for spectacles** The average optical maximum benefit for the policies we looked at last year was $200 per person for basic and $250 for medium and top cover.
- **Higher combined total limits for all therapies** The annual limits for therapies such as physiotherapy, chiropractic, massage and natural therapies are often combined with basic policies. So the total amount you can claim is smaller than with medium or top cover policies, which have separate limits. With the policies we looked at last year, the average total maximum benefit per person was $1800 for basic, $4300 for medium and $7500 for top cover.
- **More therapies covered** Basic policies rarely cover you for podiatry or psychology or medical devices such as a glucose monitor. While medium policies cover more therapies, annual limits are usually lower than for top cover. For example, the average cover for hearing aids with medium policies is $500, whereas top cover pays $800 on average.

The essentials of extras

There are two groups of people who benefit most from extras insurance.

Families They pay the same premium as couples – or double the singles premium – so children are insured for free.

Tip Some health funds offer no-gap cover for kids, for example for dental.

People aged 55-74 Of all the age groups, this one makes the most use of their extras benefits and receives an average benefit per person of about $500 – almost 10 times more than for children under five.

Couples policies can be bad value

A couples policy normally costs exactly the same as two single policies. So if a basic policy suits you best and a medium policy suits your partner best, go for two different policies rather than a medium-cover couple policy.

Look for percentage benefits

Rather than simply paying a fixed amount for a service, such as up to $30 for a physiotherapy session, some policies cover a percentage of your bill, usually from 60% up to 100%. This can be useful if you go to a dentist or other healthcare provider who charges above-average prices. Where these types of benefits apply, it's worth checking and comparing your annual limits for the particular services with those of other policies.

Look for funds with provider schemes near you

A number of health funds offer provider schemes or even their own optical or dental centres. The fund will have negotiated a price (usually lower than the normal price) with, for example, the dentist or optical store, and will also pay a higher benefit to you. Full cover is sometimes available.

Check for loyalty bonuses

Some health funds pay higher benefits to loyal members. While this is good for you if you've been with them for a long time, it can be a disadvantage for new members since your time with another fund is not counted towards these bonuses.

Have you used your lifestyle cover?

Some extras policies offer services such as massage or gym classes and even sunscreen or a first-aid course. ■

AVERAGE RETURN ON EXTRAS CLAIMS

	Dental (%)	Optical (%)	Physio (%)	Chiro (%)	Pharmacy (%)	Podiatry (%)	Natural therapies (%)	Hearing aids (%)
OPEN MEMBERSHIP FUNDS								
AHM	45	67	46	53	40	49	38	32
Australian Unity	48	66	64	51	43	53	49	18
BUPA	50	50	52	56	38	47	38	21
CUA	54	57	49	50	36	51	40	49
GMF & Central West	45	68	46	40	32	61	31	19
GMHBA	50	59	43	46	43	51	37	19
HBF	54	43	46	43	41	50	38	29
HCF	54	51	47	48	41	46	34	33
Health Partners	60	53	57	45	43	42	31	35
HIF	48	46	47	44	30	43	28	34
Latrobe	32	53	40	44	25	44	29	15
Medibank	50	58	47	49	34	53	50	24
NIB	56	55	60	58	34	59	53	19
Peoplecare	51	63	50	52	42	48	46	41
QCH	51	57	51	70	38	69	44	49
St. Luke's	47	54	50	57	38	52	45	48
Westfund	48	46	39	51	41	43	43	35
RESTRICTED MEMBERSHIP FUNDS								
CBHS	49	53	58	64	49	53	48	36
Defence Health	45	46	43	48	49	44	37	28
Navy Health	46	45	53	61	47	52	45	28
Teachers Health	54	49	53	64	42	60	51	38
TUH	55	53	51	60	26	66	50	32
Average benefits (%)	**50**	**54**	**50**	**52**	**39**	**52**	**41**	**31**

USING THE TABLE Cover varies by state and policy. *Source:* PHIO, 2011/12.

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

Ask the Experts

Got a niggling question our team can help with?

Q A salesman recently told me that 3D works better on a 200Hz TV over a 100Hz TV, due to the higher refresh rate. Is 200Hz worth the extra money or this just a marketing tool?

A TV expert Scott O'Keefe replies: While the salesman is not necessarily spinning you a line, the refresh rate alone is not a significant factor in 3D performance. A faster refresh rate won't be of benefit if, for example, the manufacturer skimps on the image processor. It's also worth noting that manufacturers don't boast about refresh rates nearly as much as they used to.

Generally speaking, we don't see big differences in 3D performance these days. And given that 3D viewing is almost certain to be a minority pastime, I'd recommend looking for a set with good overall performance (see *CHOICE*, Dec 13/Jan 14), and just make sure that the 3D performance is at least good.

Scott O'Keefe

Q My new phone requires a micro SIM. I've heard one option is to cut a mini SIM (which I already have) down to fit. Will this work, or will it damage the SIM?

Denis Gallagher

A Technology specialist Denis Gallagher says: Templates are available (Google "mini to micro SIM template") that allow you to draw around the mini SIM and cut it out. Otherwise, you could grab a friend's micro SIM and trace around the mini SIM. Make sure you include the entire copper-coloured chip in the cut-out – a good pair of scissors should do the job. There are also adapters that allow you to use a micro SIM in a phone using a mini SIM that should cost no more than a few dollars.

However, unless you want to keep all your contacts on your existing SIM, the best and easiest solution is to walk into a network provider storefront in your area and ask for a micro SIM. If you have an existing plan, they should give you a replacement micro SIM (with all your details) for free. If they don't, or they attempt to charge you as an existing customer, please let us know and we'll highlight their poor service in *CHOICE*.

Q How does Bluetooth work when it comes to hands-free phone calls in the car?

Ros Page

A Technology journalist Ros Page replies: Bluetooth is a wireless technology that allows devices to send and receive data over short distances. It's used to link mobile phones, laptops, tablets, headphones, keyboard, mice and a host of other specialty objects so they can communicate with each other.

Bluetooth has also been built into some newer cars, so you can connect your phone to the car's entertainment system. This allows you to answer phone calls, look for directions using the phone's GPS mapping feature and play music in the car through the phone.

The hands-free feature means that when the phone is connected with Bluetooth to the car, you can answer a call hands free. To connect, devices have to be paired, which means letting them find each other through the Bluetooth settings so they can "talk" to each other. Bluetooth.com has more on the whys and wherefores of Bluetooth technology. ■

Ask us!

Do you have a question for one of CHOICE's experts? Email us at **asktheexperts@choice.com.au** or write to us at:
Ask the Experts, CHOICE,
57 Carrington Rd, Marrickville,
NSW 2204

COMPILED BY SIOBAHN DONOHOE

On Test

Smartphones, induction cooktops, fridges and fitness watches – they're all here

42 Tablets
Which manufacturer is seriously challenging Apple's dominance?

45 Smartphones
The indispensable gadget that's getting bigger, better, faster and stronger

48 Universal remotes
It's time to take back control in your living room

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Higher operating pressure is key to the best master blasters on test

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You don't have to pay top dollar for a high-tech cooktop

57 Fridges
Pigeon pairs give you more freezer space – but at what price?

60 Dishwashers
Why we've shifted our testing focus from wet to dry

64 Ironing
From irons to steam stations and garment steamers, we lay out your options

70 Fitness watches
Our sporty home test family puts five through their paces

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The type that's right for you and your home

CHOICE's Martha Psiroukis keeps a close watch

We set the pace with our review of fitness watches on page 70

CHOICE

CHOICE'S experienced technical staff puts products through their paces in our own testing laboratories. We use test methods based on Australian standards and develop our own to match the way consumers use a product in their homes. We buy the products we test, maintaining our independence from manufacturers and so we know what you're faced with in the shops. We've checked the models are available at the time we publish. Our recommendations are based on a product's quality and performance, with no hidden bias.

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The king is dead?

Newcomers are challenging the tablet market domination by iPad, says Denis Gallagher

Nutshell

- Apple's iPad is no longer the clear winner in the competitive world of tablets.
- A tablet can replace your laptop for most tasks, but may not be the complete solution for some PC users.

Is the king finally dead? Not quite. But for the first time in CHOICE's history of testing tablet computers, Apple has lost the top spot, with the honour going to Samsung instead (see page 44).

Perfect for use in a constantly connected world, tablets are ready to go in a few seconds and require the same swiping motions and finger-touch selections familiar to smartphone users.

Some large-screen models also include a detachable keyboard, allowing you to perform most of the tasks of a laptop computer, such as document creation and writing. The smaller size of a seven-inch tablet will suit those who want to keep their device with them in a coat pocket or handbag, ready to use at a moment's notice, and is perfect for ebook reading as well as watching a movie or TV show.

		PERFORMANCE								
	Price ($)	Overall score (%)	Multimedia (%)	Ease of use (%)	Screen quality (%)	Internet and email (%)	Device overview (%)	Battery life (%)	Backup and security (%)	Battery life (h:min)
Samsung Galaxy Note 10.1 (16GB)	649	84	84	88	87	88	62	81	56	8:03
Apple iPad Air (128GB)	899	83	75	93	86	83	73	88	76	10:58
Apple iPad mini with Retina display (64GB)	699	82	75	89	84	84	75	89	76	9:52
Microsoft Surface 2 (32GB)	529	81	77	90	83	89	67	66	59	5:19
Amazon Kindle Fire HDX 8.9 (16GB)	479	80	78	88	82	81	59	82	46	8:01
Apple iPad mini (16GB)	349	79	74	89	79	81	61	88	76	13:03
Asus Transformer Pad TF700T (64GB + Kbd)	999	79	74	86	79	78	67	86	39	10:25
Amazon Kindle Fire HDX 7 (16GB)	329	78	74	86	82	81	57	81	46	7:25
Apple iPad 2 (16GB)	449	78	67	91	81	81	57	89	76	9:50
Asus Transformer Pad TF300T (32GB + Kbd)	599	78	74	80	79	84	61	85	48	5:43
Google Nexus 7 (32GB)	339	78	75	79	80	85	66	77	63	6:56
HP Slatebook 10 X2 (16GB)	599	78	79	82	72	87	52	91	61	4:53
Microsoft Surface Pro 2 (512GB)	2039	78	75	82	81	89	70	65	56	6:37

USING THE TABLE **Price** Recommended retail, as of February 2014. **Scores** The overall score is made up of multimedia (25%), ease of use (20%),

To 4G or not to 4G?

Several tablets are available in a 4G (LTE – Long Term Evolution) version, which means it uses a phone network SIM card to operate in much the same way as a smartphone to access online content. But if you own a smartphone with 4G support, you can simply create a personal hotspot using your smartphone to allow your tablet to go online. If you don't have 4G you can still use your 3G connection to connect your tablet, which though not much good for live streaming of HD video should be fine for browsing online.

USEABLE STORAGE

Tablets generally don't have the same storage capacity as laptop/desktop PCs, so take note of the available storage capacity column in the table (below). The Apple iOS and Android OS take up around 6GB of space, while Windows takes up more than 10GB, which means less space for your photos, videos and games.

IMAGES: SHUTTERSTOCK

Which tablet user are you?

BAD REACTION You're frustrated by the tablet's lack of connections, inability to print to a non-wireless printer and lack of support for MS Office and Adobe Photoshop.

SWEET BLISS You absolutely fall in love with it, using it for all your online communication, game play and movie watching, even if there is a huge TV in the room. You can be seen on holiday holding your tablet above your head like a prophet coming down from the mountain to show the world the right path to tablet heaven.

FAMILY CONNECTIONS You like the "instantly on" aspect of the tablet, using it as the primary device for daily online interactions, web searches and general browsing. It's also used in the bedroom to watch movies, video chats and email. You still use your laptop, but only when the tablet won't cut it.

FEATURES & SPECIFICATIONS

Operating system	USB 2.0	HDMI	Wi-Fi (802.11 g/n)	GPS	Memory card (microSD)	Front camera resolution (Mp)	Rear camera resolution (Mp)	Storage capacity (claimed GB)	Storage capacity (available GB)	Screen size (in, diagonal)	Native resolution (pixels, W x H)	Video resolution (vertical lines, progressive)	Weight (kg)	Size (mm, W x H x D)	Contact
Android 4.3	✓		✓	✓	✓	2.1	6.0	16	8.7	10.1	2560 x 1600	1080	0.5	243 x 171 x 9	samsung.com/au
iOS 7.0.3			✓			1.2	5.0	128	122	9.7	2048 x 1536	1080	0.5	240 x 169 x 8	apple.com.au
iOS 7.0.4			✓			1.2	5.0	64	58	7.9	2048 x 1536	1080	0.3	200 x 134 x 8	apple.com.au
Windows RT 8.1	✓(A)	✓	✓		✓	3.0	3.7	32	17.1	10.5	1920 x 1080	1080	0.6	274 x 172 x 9	microsoft.com/au
Fire OS 3.0	✓		✓			0.8	7.7	16	10.8	8.9	2560 x 1600	1080	0.4	230 x 157 x 8	amazon.com.au
iOS 6.0.1			✓			1.2	5.0	16	9.6	7.9	1024 x 768	1080	0.3	200 x 134 x 7	apple.com.au
Android 4.0.3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓(B)	2.0	8.0	64	57.9	10.1	1920 x 1200	1080	1.1	266 x 187 x 18	asus.com.au
Fire OS 3.0	✓		✓			0.8	na	16	10.4	7.0	1920 x 1200	1080	0.3	186 x 127 x 9	amazon.com.au
iOS 5.0.1			✓			0.3	0.8	16	11	9.7	1024 x 768	720	0.6	241 x 185.7 x 9	apple.com.au
Android 4.0.3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓(B)	1.2	8.0	32	27.2	10.1	1280 x 800	720	1.2	262 x 180 x 18	asus.com.au
Android 4.3	✓		✓	✓		0.8	5.0	32	25.8	7.0	1920 x 1280	1080	0.3	200 x 114 x 9	play.google.com/store/devices
Android 4.2.2	✓	✓	✓		✓	0.9	2.1	16	11.8	10	1920 x 1200	720	1.3	258 x 194 x 10	hp.com.au
Windows 8.1 Pro	✓(A)		✓		✓	0.9	0.9	512	465	10.5	1920 x 1080	1080	0.9	275 x 173 x 14	microsoft.com/au

screen quality (20%) internet and email (15%), device overview (10%) and battery life (10%). **TABLE NOTES na** Not applicable. **(A)** Uses faster USB 3 protocol. **(B)** Also supports full-sized SD cards. **Kbd** Keyboard.

WHAT TO BUY

ANDROID OS

84%
Samsung Galaxy Note 10.1 (16GB)

If you're thinking about a non-Apple tablet, the Samsung Galaxy Note 10.1 should be at the top of your list.

While the usable memory available (less than 9GB) isn't great, you can easily upgrade it using inexpensive microSD cards up to 64GB. The screen quality and multimedia support is very good, and the battery will last a full day with normal use.

APPLE iOS

83%
Apple iPad Air (128GB)

The Apple iPad Air is lighter, slimmer and more powerful than the previous model, with the latest iOS7 software making it easier to use. It's available in various memory capacities, but we suggest going with the highest capacity you can afford as there is no support for a removable memory card on this tablet. You'll need as much onboard storage as possible if you like watching movies while on holiday.

SMALL TABLET

82%
Apple iPad mini with Retina display (64GB)

The iPad mini is an ideal companion for those who want to keep their tablet with them in a coat pocket or handbag. Larger than any smartphone (for the moment – see p45), its size and Retina screen make it ideal for ebook reading as well as watching video. If the price is a turn-off and you want a good-value alternative to the iPad mini, consider the Android-based **Google Nexus 7**.

WINDOWS 8

81%
Microsoft Surface 2 (32GB)

Microsoft's second tablet effort is no doubt an improvement on the first. The screen is better, USB 3.0 connections deliver faster file transfers, and it's lighter. It also helps deliver a better user experience, with an improved kickback stand for better support when using the device on your lap. The problem with this model is not the device itself but the fact that it's the third-most popular OS choice for tablets behind iOS and Android by a significant margin.

EREADER/TABLET

80%
Amazon Kindle Fire HDX 8.9 (16GB)

Amazon Fire OS 3.0 presents a simply elegant interface that should help the less technologically savvy feel more comfortable using their tablet. The ebook purchasing process is straightforward, and you can share your purchases across multiple devices on the same Kindle account.

Although the Amazon Fire OS 3.0 is built on top of Google's Android OS, you can't access the underlying Android OS, which can be frustrating.

TABLET/HYBRID SOLUTION

78%
Microsoft Surface Pro 2 (512GB)

If you're looking for a tablet but don't want to give up all the functionality and features of a laptop/desktop PC, the Surface Pro 2 could fit the bill. Tablet app support lags behind Apple and Google, but this issue pales into insignificance when you can use applications such as Adobe Photoshop and MS Office.

Battery life isn't great for a tablet and the asking price is high. But if you want a tablet that will also work like a PC, the Surface Pro 2 covers all bases. ■

Bigger, better, faster, stronger

Is that a phone in your pocket or…? **Denis Gallagher** checks out the latest trends in smartphone design and functionality

Nutshell

- Apple's iPhone 5s and 5c remain popular smartphone choices, but Android continues to dominate overall sales.
- The trend for smartphones in 2014 is bigger screens and faster online performance using 4G.

Smartphones have become so much a part of our lives that many of us feel incomplete if one is not in our pocket or handbag as we walk out the door to start a new day. The smartphone can be your bank teller, weatherman, newspaper, appointment maker and answerer of any question imaginable.

They're also getting bigger and bigger. Released in 2011, Samsung Galaxy Note's 5.3-inch screen was considered a brave move by some when the most popular smartphone of the day (Apple's iPhone 4) had a compact 3.5-inch screen. Fast-forward to today, and Apple's iPhone 5s and 5c models are among the smallest smartphones available despite an increase in the screen size to four inches.

The current trend for larger smartphones is not only changing how we use our phone, but also what we wear. According to clothing makers like Dockers and Banana Republic, fashion houses now have to incorporate larger pockets and stronger seams in their trouser and coat designs to accommodate the extra size.

Despite a torrid 2013 for Microsoft and Nokia as they scrambled to present a viable alternative to Apple's iOS or Google Android, the outlook for both in 2014 seems bright. Recent smartphone models using the Windows Phone 8 mobile OS deliver a good range of features, performance and value for money. The Nokia Lumia 625 is one of the most affordable 4G handsets currently available, while the Lumia 925 and 1020 deliver more features, a better camera and a higher screen resolution.

Life in the 4G fast lane

All phones on test support 4G networks, delivering the same sort of online performance you'd expect from your home broadband network using a Wi-Fi connection. While 4G coverage was initially restricted to major airports and city CBD areas and only available to Telstra users, the situation has improved over the past year. Vodafone and Optus now offer 4G network support in parts of mainland capital cities and major regional centres such as Newcastle and the Gold Coast.

Buying a 4G-enabled mobile now will help future-proof your smartphone and also prove very useful for notebook or tablet PC owners, as you can use your mobile as a personal hotspot (see our tablet test on page 42). But be sure to check your data plan to avoid any nasty bill shocks.

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

WHAT TO BUY

ANDROID SMARTPHONE

80%

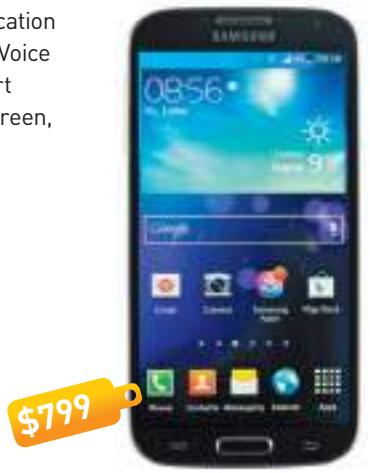
Samsung Galaxy S4 (16GB)

Good points

- Has near field communication (NFC) and wideband HD Voice
- Personal hotspot support
- Excellent email, touchscreen, SMS and display scores
- Very good music score

Bad points

- No FM radio



LARGE-SCREEN CHAMPION

80%

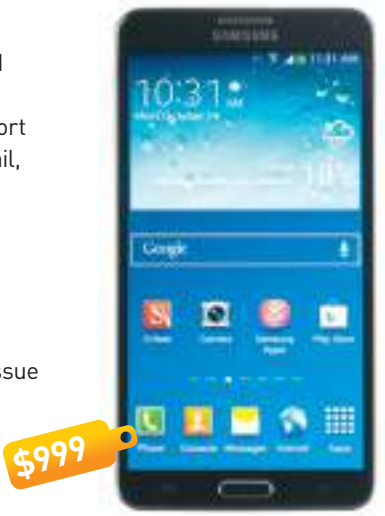
Samsung Galaxy Note 3

Good points

- Has NFC and wideband HD Voice
- Personal hotspot support
- Excellent internet, email, touchscreen, SMS and display scores
- Very good camera and music scores

Bad points

- Large size may be an issue for single-handed use



		PERFORMANCE															FEATURES				
	Price ($)	Overall score (%)	Internet score (%)	Reception score (%)	Sound quality score (%)	Email score (%)	Camera score (%)	Music score (%)	Video score (%)	Handling score (%)	Touchscreen score (%)	SMS score (%)	GPS score (%)	Synchronisation score (%)	Display score (%)	Durability score (%)	NFC (Near Field Communication)	MicroSD memory card slot	Vibration feedback (touchscreen)	Automatic silent mode if turned face down	FM radio
Samsung Galaxy S4	799	80	84	68	70	91	76	83	65	83	92	93	71	80	93	74	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Samsung Galaxy Note 3	999	80	92	54	68	91	82	83	71	84	92	93	70	80	94	78	✓	✓	✓	✓	
HTC One	799	77	77	63	72	84	71	82	77	84	92	93	65	80	93	71	✓		✓	✓	✓
LG G2	599	77	87	48	73	91	75	79	67	83	84	93	67	80	85	77	✓		✓	✓	✓
Sony Xperia Z Ultra	799	77	81	77	72	91	61	84	48	81	92	93	56	80	81	69	✓	✓	✓		✓
Sony Xperia Z1	779	77	83	59	68	91	73	83	70	81	92	93	59	80	87	66	✓	✓	✓		✓
Samsung Galaxy Mega	449	76	82	62	68	98	57	83	63	83	92	85	63	80	84	77	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Samsung Galaxy S4 Active	599	76	77	69	65	91	67	83	53	78	92	93	69	80	81	76	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Apple iPhone 5c	869	75	73	57	77	80	77	81	76	76	87	87	58	70	85	70					
Nokia Lumia 1020	749	75	75	57	70	82	79	80	80	65	87	71	72	80	88	85	✓		✓(A)	✓	✓
Samsung Galaxy S4 Mini	599	75	77	68	74	80	66	82	63	83	71	83	59	80	84	77	✓	✓		✓	✓
Apple iPhone 5s	999	74	73	42	79	80	81	82	80	77	87	87	59	70	85	77					
HTC One Mini	499	74	71	61	75	82	64	80	74	85	92	86	55	80	70	71			✓	✓	✓
Nokia Lumia 925	499	74	70	63	76	82	72	79	73	65	87	71	70	80	85	80	✓		✓(A)	✓	✓
Samsung Galaxy S4 Zoom	599	74	81	49	73	73	81	83	74	83	76	75	50	80	84	78		✓	✓	✓	
LG Google Nexus 5	420	70	79	40	72	84	62	61	55	73	92	83	60	80	86	83	✓		✓		
Nokia Lumia 625	299	70	73	57	70	82	63	73	67	60	87	71	59	80	66	78		✓	✓(A)	✓	✓

APPLE iOS

75%

Apple iPhone 5c

Good points

- Has wideband HD Voice
- Personal hotspot support
- Very good music score

Bad points

- No removable memory support

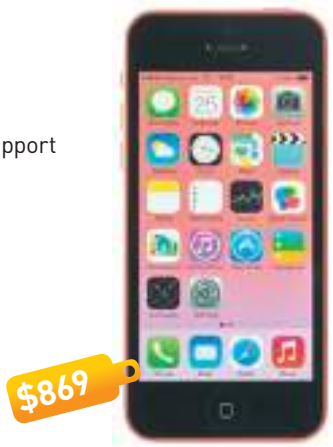


IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

WINDOWS PHONE 8

75%

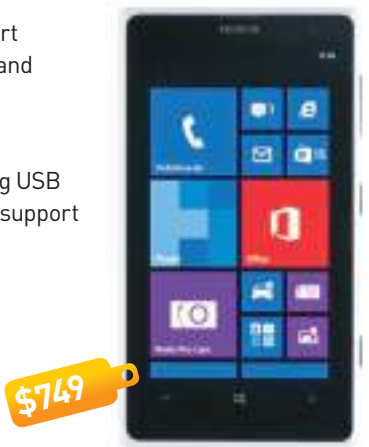
Nokia Lumia 1020

Good points

- Has NFC and HD Voice
- Personal hotspot support
- Very good music, video and durability scores

Bad points

- No direct tethering using USB
- No removable memory support



	SPECIFICATIONS									
Removable battery	Internal memory (GB)	Camera resolution (Mp)	Specific absorption rate (SAR) (W/kg)	Battery capacity (mAh)	Operating system	Name of app marketplace	Screen resolution (pixels)	Display size (in)	Weight (g)	Contact
✓	16	13	0.40	2600	A	GP	1080 x 1920	5.0	130	samsung.com.au
✓	32	13	0.36	3200	A	GP	1080 x 1920	5.7	167	samsung.com.au
	32	4	0.86	2300	A	GP	1080 x 1920	4.6	145	htc.com/au
	16	13	0.47	3000	A	GP	1080 x 1920	5.2	146	lg.com.au
	16	8	0.44	3000	A	GP	1080 x 1920	6.4	213	sony.com.au
	16	21	0.77	3000	A	GP	1080 x 1920	5.0	172	sony.com.au
✓	8	8	0.28	3200	A	GP	720 x 1280	6.3	200	samsung.com.au
✓	16	8	0.36	2600	A	GP	1080 x 1920	5.0	152	samsung.com.au
	32	8	1.00	1510	I	AS	640 x 1136	4.0	132	apple.com.au
	32	38	0.76	2000	P	W	768 x 1280	4.4	160	nokia.com.au
✓	8	8	0.33	1900	A	GP	540 x 960	4.3	109	samsung.com.au
	32	8	1.00	1560	I	AS	640 x 1136	4.0	113	apple.com.au
	16	3	0.70	1800	A	GP	720 x 1280	4.3	124	htc.com/au
	16	8	0.81	2000	P	W	768 x 1280	4.4	139	nokia.com.au
✓	8	16	0.20	2330	A	GP	540 x 960	4.3	208	samsung.com.au
	16	8	0.49	2300	A	GP	1080 x 1920	5.0	130	google.com.au
	8	5	0.95	2000	P	W	480 x 800	4.7	164	nokia.com.au

USING THE TABLE All phones on test have a 3.5mm headset socket; micro USB PC connection that can also charge the phone (except the Apple iPhone models using a proprietary Lightning connection); quad-band GSM support as well as support for the 2100MHz 3G band; hands-free talk mode and a capacitive touchscreen. All models on test support HD Voice and use a micro SIM except the Apple iPhones, which use a nano SIM card. All models support HD video recording, have a front-facing camera and a still photo resolution of at least 8Mp except the HTC One (4Mp), HTC One Mini and the Nokia Lumia 625 (5Mp). All models support autofocus by touching an area on the screen. The Sony Xperia Z Ultra is the only model without a photo flash, and together with the Samsung Mega is the only model with a screen larger than six inches, which almost puts these phones in the small tablet class. **Price** Recommended retail, as of February 2014. You can get most of these phones except the Apple iPhones for less by shopping around. **Scores** The overall score is made up of internet (15%), reception (10%), calling sound quality (10%), email (10%), camera (10%), music (10%), video (5%), handling (5%), touchscreen (5%), SMS (5%), GPS (5%), PC sync (5%), display (2.5%) and durability (2.5%). **Smartphone operating system** P = Windows Phone 8, A = Android 4 or greater, I = Apple iOS 7. **App marketplace** W = Windows Phone Store, AS = App Store, GP = Google Play.
TABLE NOTES (A) Vibration feedback for the three buttons at the bottom of the phone only.

Nutshell

- Universal remote controls take time to set up.
- A phone app can be convenient but also get in the way when multi-tasking.

Battle for control

Can one remote replace all the others in your lounge? **Chris Ruggles** finds out

These days a living room can easily have four or five remote controls – all of which will get lost, have a flat battery or eventually stop working. Having one device that controls everything easily is the ideal. This is possible, but only if you're willing to put in some work to set up the remote.

Logitech, Griffin Beacon and One-for-All models have large lists of devices, such as TVs and Blu-ray players, to select from. All on test can also "learn" from an existing remote if necessary. The L5 creates a new virtual remote for each of your existing ones, which is tedious. However, there is a cloud-based repository of "skins" for equipment that other users have contributed, which you can access via the website, making the process a little easier. Sunwave has a limited list of remotes and codes, and it's a slow and tiring exercise to cycle through to find one that works.

One-touch command

Most of these products can start a number of devices with a single button. These "activities" or macros (see opposite) are handy if you enjoy watching movies using a home theatre system with a number of components. But some entertainment equipment can take quite a while to start up or shut down completely. To deal with this, the remote has to introduce a delay between commands.

Logitech has relatively simple online tools for programming the remote control. The Griffin Beacon can do it, but it's not as simple to use. The One-for-All products are limited in what they can control, and we found them difficult to use. The One-for-All Smart Control has three predetermined activities that can't be modified. The L5 doesn't really have this function, so you have to move from one remote skin to another. However, you can program a sequence within a remote. The Sunwave SRC-3200 can do activities, but only at the expense of one of the existing function buttons, and the RKM-520 doesn't have this function at all.

What about your phone?

Smartphone manufacturers now offer apps that work in conjunction with infra-red/wireless controllers in place of yet another remote control device. However, working on the one device may actually be a disadvantage in some situations.

		PERFORMANCE			FEATURES
	Price ($)	Overall score (%)	Ease of use (%)	Robustness (%)	Display type
Logitech Harmony Smart Control	169	88	85 (A)	100	Phone (C)
Logitech Harmony Touch	198	86	82	100	Colour LCD
Logitech Harmony 1100i	332	85	81	100	Colour LCD
One for All Xsight Touch URC8603	210	78	72	100	Colour LCD
L5 L5 Remote	70	71	64 (B)	100	Phone
# Griffin Beacon Universal Remote Control for Android	95	68	61 (B)	100	Phone
# Griffin Beacon Universal Remote Control for iOS	95	68	61 (B)	100	Phone
One for All Smart Control URC7960	80	67	59	100	
Sunwave SRC-3200	129	46	37	80	Monochrome LCD
Sunwave RKM-520	169	34	35	30	

USING THE TABLE **Scores** The overall score is made up of ease of use (80%) and robustness (20%). **Prices** are as paid in July 2013. **Weight**
Discontinued, but may be available second-hand.

The three apps in this test (Logitech Harmony Smart, Control, which can support Android or iOS, L5 and Griffin Beacon) are reasonably good solutions, but it's worth considering how much of a hassle it will be if you get a phone call and want to mute the TV quickly. Smartphones come in many sizes, so the size of the buttons on the remote control app can be quite small. Also, you have no tactile indication of what you're doing, so you'll have to take your eyes off the screen at some point.

A tablet may be a better solution, but you'll still have to exit whatever else you're doing to control the TV (for example). And losing or accidentally flushing your phone will mean that, sadly, you lose your TV remote as well.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

LCD screen displays information on what device is being controlled. Screens can be monochrome or colour and may also be touchscreens.
Backlight can help in dark situations.
Touchscreen allows some controls to be programmed and/or used by touching the screen rather than physical buttons. Other screens just show the labels for buttons adjacent to the screen (like an ATM machine).
Macros deliver a sequence of commands to a variety of devices from a single key on the remote. If you want to perform complex functions, look for a remote with a large number of macro steps.
Pause allows a gap of a few seconds to be inserted between macros to help minimise errors where devices take some time to complete a command.
Rename/reassign key sets a different function to one of the standard keys displayed on the screen for any device. For example, if you often use the "change aspect ratio" function of your TV, you may want this to be included in the TV layout of the remote.
Volume punch through allows the volume and mute keys to be assigned to a single device, for example a home theatre receiver. The advantage is that you can mute or change volume with a single key press, no matter what device the remote is currently set to control.
Programmable timer allows the remote to provide a sequence of instructions at a certain time. You could ask it to turn on the set-top box at 6.50pm, then start the hard-drive recorder at 7pm.
Learning allows the universal remote to "learn" directly from other remotes instead of using pre-installed codes. A learning sensor at the base is easier to use, as both the learning remote and the "teaching" remote will be pointing the same way (rather than with their buttons reversed) during the learning process.
Check whether **rechargeable batteries** are supplied. If not, you may need to factor in the cost of a good set of rechargeable batteries for future use.
Base station can be used to recharge the batteries and store the control.
Memory retention allows the remote to retain its memory for key functions even when the batteries are removed.
Motion detector wakes the remote from sleep mode when it's picked up. This saves you looking for the on button in the dark and helps conserve battery power.

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

								SPECIFICATIONS						
Touchscreen	Pauses in macros	Rechargeable	Base station	Volume punch through	USB connection	Supplied software	Minimum computer system requirements	Number of devices	Number of macros	Number of macro steps	Dimensions (mm, D x W x H)	Weight (g) *	Display size (mm, H x W)	Contact
	✓			✓	✓		Windows XP. OSX 10.5. Android 2.3.3 or iOS 6.0	8	ns	ns	168 x 55 x 18	113	na	logitech.com
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		Windows XP. OSX 10.5	15	ns	ns	185 x 56 x 31	160	36 x 50	logitech.com
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Harmony Remote 7.6.0	Windows XP. OSX 10.4	15	ns	ns	104 x 140 x 16	196	70 x 53	logitech.com
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	EZRC 1.0	Windows XP SP3	18	18	ns	221 x 57 x 19	185	34 x 43	oneforall.com
	✓			✓			iOS 3.0	1000	ns	ns	22 x 31 x 10	5	na	l5remote.com
	✓			✓			Android 2.3.3	Unlimited	ns	ns	94 x 94 x 47	206	na	griffintechnology.com
	✓			✓			iOS 4.0	Unlimited	ns	ns	94 x 94 x 47	206	na	griffintechnology.com
				✓			ns	6	3		221 x 55 x 25	164	na	oneforall.com
✓	✓						ns	8	ns	60	221 x 63 x 21	299	39 x 103	sun-wave.com
		✓			✓		Windows XP	8			181 x 58 x 22	166	na	sun-wave.com

includes batteries. **TABLE NOTES (A)** Based on the supplied remote control. **(B)** Based on either the iPhone 5 or LG Nexus 4 as appropriate. **(C)** The supplied remote has no screen. **na** Not applicable. **ns** Not stated.

WHAT TO BUY

88%
Logitech Harmony Smart Control

Good points
- PC software is well documented and easy to use
- Comes with an extra remote control, which doesn't require the app to work once it's set up
- The functionality of the supplied extra remote's buttons is obvious and intuitive, and there is a good range of them

Bad points
- Printed set-up instructions are brief and insufficient – we had to refer to the Logitech website
- The phone app doesn't have sufficiently clear steps for initial set-up
- Requires a Wi-Fi network (to which the Harmony hub and your phone need to connect)
- Supplied remote has very small numeric buttons with very small labelling
- The supplied remote only has three activity buttons (although a long press can be used to access a further three)
- Online account creation may be an issue if you're upgrading from a previous Logitech model

Two good performers also worth considering are the **One for All Xsight Touch URC8603** and the **L5.**

86%
Logitech Harmony Touch

Good points
- Physical button functionality is obvious and intuitive and there is a good range of them
- PC software is well documented and easy to use

Bad points
- Bottom half of the remote is bulbous and heavy
- Our TV model was not listed
- Our BD player was incorrectly identified and shown as a home theatre system
- The product packaging shows on-screen favourite logos for Australian broadcasters, but these can't be automatically added as favourites
- Online account creation may be an issue if you are upgrading from a previous Logitech model

85%
Logitech Harmony 1100i

Good points
- Physical button functionality is obvious and intuitive
- PC software is well documented and easy to use

Bad points
- Relatively bulky size and shape
- Relatively expensive
- Our TV model was not listed
- Our Blu-ray player was incorrectly identified and shown as a home theatre system ■

Master blasters

Chris Barnes finds that bigger is better when it comes to pressure cleaners

Nutshell

- We review 13 electric pressure cleaners priced from $69 to $429.
- Bigger models are more likely to deliver higher pressure and better cleaning results.

If you have a lot of concrete, paving or stonework that regularly accumulates grime, a pressure cleaner may be a wise investment. Whether the problem is mould, lichen, pollution or trees dropping fruit and sticky sap, some cleaning jobs are just too tough for a broom or a scrubbing brush.

WHY BUY?
For one-off use, rent a pressure cleaner rather than buy one – they cost as little as $60 a day

Over our many years of testing all kinds of products, we've found that a neither a big engine nor a lot of power is a guarantee of performance. But with pressure cleaners it's clear that more power does equal better performance. The recommended models on test have claimed operating pressures of 1595psi; the rest are generally well below that. Smaller models with lower pressure can still do the job, but will usually take longer.

Even with a powerful cleaner, the job can take some time. Our testers found it takes a few minutes to clean one square metre of heavily soiled concrete. And be careful when cleaning painted or grouted areas, as a pressure cleaner can strip away paint and grouting.

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Trigger lock prevents accidental starting. For all tested models, the motor won't start until the trigger is operated.

Nozzles can make a real difference to what you can clean. The three types available are:

- **Rotary** This is best for heavily soiled areas such as footpaths and driveways. It makes a circle of pressurised water, often in an intermittent pulse that causes vibrations.
- **Fan** provides a wide spray of water and is suitable for large areas that aren't too dirty, such as the painted walls of a house. It can often be adjusted to form a tight spray, but be careful with this adjustment, as it can strip paint away if used too close to a painted wall.
- **Pencil** This very tight beam of water is good for removing stubborn spots as the pressure is concentrated.

Lance should be long enough that you can comfortably hold its tip near the ground without stooping.

A **long hose** from the cleaner body to the lance also helps make the unit easier to use.

Hose and lance storage on the cleaner keeps it neat and tidy when not in use.

WHAT TO BUY

84%
eXceed EX22HPW

Good points

- Excellent cleaning performance
- Very easy to wheel about and operate the gun
- Only a very slight vibration
- Patio cleaner accessory included

Bad points

- Lance is a little short
- Noisiest unit in test
- A little heavy

Brush accessories attach to the lance. A patio brush is for scrubbing a deck or paved area; the eXceed, AR Blue Clean and Worx come with one. Other brush heads (fixed or rotating) can be useful for cleaning cars and other areas; the Evoworks comes with a rotating brush.

Detergent applicator makes it much easier to use detergent when necessary. All models on test can be used with detergent, but the Karcher K3.800 eco!ogic and the Jetpower don't come with a detergent bottle or attachment.

Wheels make it easier to manoeuvre the cleaner, both when cleaning and in and out of storage.

Noise The cleaners on test range between 72-81dB. For comparison, a typical vacuum cleaner measures about 72dB, while traffic on a busy road measures about 80dB.

Water usage Models on test use from 282L to 400L per hour. Check local water restrictions before use.

HOW WE TEST

Performance Our tester, James Thomson, uses each pressure cleaner on concrete. The concrete surfaces are mossy, encrusted with hard dirt and stained such that they need pressure cleaning rather than simple sweeping with a broom. He visually assesses the amount of soiling/staining on the test surface before and after cleaning, and times how fast the cleaner is at cleaning.

Ease of use is made up of manouevrability and ease of cleaning, weighted equally. Manoeuvrability is based on how long the hose is to connect the lance to the cleaner, whether it has wheels and if they're any good, and how heavy the cleaner is with everything connected. Our ease of cleaning score is based on how easy it is to use the lance and whether or not it's too short, the handle and trigger comfort and if there's too much vibration from the cleaner.

84%
Hitachi AW150

Good points

- Very good cleaning performance
- Very long hose
- Very easy to wheel about
- Only a very slight vibration
- Easy to operate the gun

Bad points

- Lance is a little short
- A little heavy

PREVIOUSLY RECOMMENDED

88% Stihl RE 108	$399	**83% Gerni** Super 130.2	$419
86% Lavor Aussie 20	$499	**83% Karcher** K4.650	$499
84% Gerni Super 140.2	$539	(see *CHOICE*, Feb 12)	

Note: Due to a change in our test method, the scores for previously tested models aren't directly comparable and so these models aren't included in the table below.

ABOUT THE REST

The **Gerni Classic**, **Evoworks**, **Karcher** and **Scorpion** models are easy to use and good performers, but aren't as fast to strip away dirt as the recommended cleaners. The **AR Blue Clean** is good overall but a bit slower at cleaning, while the **Kincrome** is a good performer but not easy to wheel around.

The **Homelite**, **Worx** and **Jetpower** cleaners are slower at cleaning than the other models – especially the Jetpower. The Homelite and Jetpower have particularly short hoses and no wheels, though they are light enough to carry. ■

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		PERFORMANCE				FEATURES			SPECIFICATIONS				
	Price ($)	Overall score (%)	Cleaning performance (%)	Ease of use (%)	Noise (dB)	Fan nozzle	Rotary nozzle	Wheels	Weight (kg)	Reach from power point (m)	Claimed operating pressure (bar / psi)	Claimed water consumption (L/h)	Contact
eXceed EX22HPW	199	84	90	75	81	✓	✓	✓	12.0	10.5	110 / 1595	400	1300 889 028
Hitachi AW150	299	84	88	78	78	✓	✓	✓	12.5	15.6	110 / 1595	396	hitachi-powertools.com.au
Gerni Classic 120.2PC	299	79	78	80	75		✓	✓	9.1	11.7	100 / 1450	348	gerni.com.au
Evoworks Ultimate 2100	429	76	72	81	77	✓	✓	✓	18.8	16.2	110 / 1600	282	hoselink.com.au
Karcher K3.800 eco!logic	399	76	76	76	79		✓	✓	12.3	13.1	110 / 1595	378	karcher.com.au
Scorpion SPW130	218	75	76	74	74	✓	✓	✓	8.7	11.3	100 / 1450	370	masters.com.au
Karcher K2.360	249	74	72	76	75		✓	✓	6.2	11.5	80 / 1160	330	karcher.com.au
AR Blue Clean 360Plus	229	72	68	78	80	✓(A)	✓(A)	✓	8.0	13.6	80 / 1160	390	masters.com.au
Gerni Classic 115.3	159	72	72	73	72		✓	✓	6.6	10.8	80 / 1160	312	gerni.com.au
Kincrome Mighty Boy Pressure Washer 1300W	149	72	74	69	78	✓	✓	✓	5.8	8.4	54 / 780	360	kincrome.com.au
Homelite HPW100	69	65	66	64	75	✓			5.0	8.8	70 / 1015	330	bunnings.com.au
Worx Force 120 WG602E	159	65	59	74	77		✓	✓	5.3	11.3	120 / 1740	360	worx.com
Jetpower JET320	110	51	43	64	73	✓			6.6	9.1	60 / 870	320	jetpower.net.au

USING THE TABLE Price Recommended or typical retail, as of December 2013. **Scores** The overall score is made up of performance (60%) and ease of use (40%). **TABLE NOTES (A)** Three-in-one nozzle (fan, rotary and detergent).

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

High tech, low cost

You don't have to pay top dollar for an induction cooktop these days, says **Chris Barnes**

Induction cooktops have proved to be very good or excellent in CHOICE tests over the past few years. Their sophisticated technology, which uses electromagnetism to generate heat directly in the cookware rather than by heating the cooktop itself, allows fine heat control as well as good energy efficiency. They're fast, too – an induction cooktop will typically boil one litre of water in two minutes, compared with six minutes on a standard ceramic and eight on gas.

This latest round-up includes some brands not previously covered in our induction cooktop tests: Bellini (from Bunnings), Euromaid, Ikea, Neff and Whirlpool. Of these, the Euromaid and Neff are comparatively disappointing in performance and ease of use respectively, though they're still good overall.

You'll need suitable saucepans for induction cooking – see *CHOICE* Feb 14

Nutshell

- Nine new cooktops on test, including three priced below $1000.
- The three least expensive models are very good overall and we recommend them.

WHAT TO BUY

We recommend most cooktops on test as most are very good or excellent performers, and don't score below a good rating for any test. See About the Rest, page 56, for details of those not recommended. Here we only profile the newly tested models that are recommended. For profiles of previously tested induction cooktops, as well as what to look for, see *CHOICE*, Sep 13. Important functions and scores for all models are listed in the table below. For details of how we test, log on to **choice.com.au/inductioncooktops**

Performance & flexibility

These three models (right) provide excellent cooking performance and

	PERFORMANCE		
	Price ($)	Overall score (%)	Cooking performance (%)
Miele KM 6113	1999	93	100
Fisher & Paykel CI905DTB1	2709	92	100
• **Fisher & Paykel** CI604DTB2	2169	91	95
• **Electrolux** EHI645BA	2069	90	95
Miele KM 6317	2499	90	100
Westinghouse PHN644DU	1261	90	95
• **Whirlpool** ACM816BA	1499	90	95
• **Ikea** Nutid HIN4T	699	87	95
Smeg SIHP264S	2290	87	92
Bosch PIE675N14E	2099	86	93
Miele KM 6350 LPT	3199	86	93
AEG HK 854220 XB	3199	85	90
Highland HP61FC	3750	83	83
• **Omega** OI64Z	999	82	83
Samsung CTN464NC01/XSA	1699	82	83
• **Bellini** BDI604SG-F	648	81	82
• **DeLonghi** DEIND604	1599	81	83
• **Euromaid** IHT60	1299	76	80
• **Neff** T44T42N2	2499	74	78

USING THE TABLE Price Recommended retail, as of January 2014. **dimensions** are claimed. Ventilation dimensions below and behind are not listed requirements before buying. **TABLE NOTES•** Newly tested. **(A)** For water only.

flexible options for cooking. The **Fisher & Paykel** has four "smart zones"- you can place two or more small pots in each smart zone and they'll be detected as one large pot, which can be handy for preparing several dishes at once. The Fisher & Paykel and the **Electrolux** each have two flexi zones (two elements linked together) that accommodate large rectangular pans. The **Whirlpool** has a large rectangular flexi zone that accommodates various pan sizes.

Each of these cooktops has easy-to-use touch controls; the Fisher & Paykel and Electrolux have separate controls for each cooking zone. On the downside, the Whirlpool has only one control for all zones, and they're a little confusing at first. The controls of the Electrolux and Whirlpool are also too close to the cooking zones.

91%
Fisher & Paykel CI604DTB2

90%
Electrolux EHI645BA

90%
Whirlpool ACM816BA

					FEATURES			SPECIFICATIONS					
Simmer (%)	Turn down (%)	High heat (%)	Ease of use (%)	Standby energy (W/h)	Auto heat-up	Keep-warm function	Flexi zones	Number of cooking zones	Pan diameters for each element (cm)	Element wattage (kW)	Dimensions (cm, W x D)	Installation dimensions (cm, W x D)	Contact
100	100	100	82	0.43	✓	✓	✓	3	10-16 / 14-20 / 18-28	1.4 / 1.85 / 2.6	58 x 51	57 x 49	miele.com.au
100	100	100	80	0.87	✓	✓		5	15.5 / 2 x 19 / 22/ 28	1.4 / 1.85 / 2.3 / 2.4	90 x 53	87 x 49	fisherpaykel.com.au
100	85	100	86	0.32	✓		✓	4	4 x 12 (B)	4 x 2.1	60 x 53	56 x 49	fisherpaykel.com.au
100	100	85	82	0.44	✓	✓	✓	4	4 x 12.5	4 x 2.3	59 x 52	56 x 49	electrolux.com.au
100	100	100	76	1.41	✓	✓	✓	4	10-16 / 14-20 / 14-20 (20 x 30) / 16-23 (C)	1.4 / 2 x 1.85 / 2 x 2.3	58 x 51	57 x 49	miele.com.au
95	100	90	83	1.25	✓	✓		4	14.5 / 18 / 21	2 x 1.4 / 1.8 / 2.3	61 x 52	56 x 49	westinghouse.com.au
100	85	100	82	0.39			✓	4	14.5 / 21 / 2 x 23	1.2 / 2 x 1.8 / 2.2	58 x 51	55 x 48	whirlpool.com.au
100	100	85	76	0.39				4	10 - 14.5 / 2 x 12-18 / 15-21	1.2 / 2 x 1.8 / 2.2	58 x 51	55 x 48	ikea.com.au
90	85	100	80	0.58		✓		4	9-16 / 12-23	2 x 1.4 / 2 x 3.0	59 x 52	56 x 49	smeg.com.au
90	90	100	74	0.87				4	14.5 / 18 / 21	1.4 / 2 x 1.8 / 2.2	53 x 60	56 x 49	boschappliances.com.au
90	95	95	76	0.20	✓	✓	✓	4	10 / 14 / 18 / 20	1.4 / 2 x 1.85 / 2.6	80 x 52	78 x 50	miele.com.au
90	85	95	78	0.37	✓	✓		4	2 x 14.5 / 12.5 / 21	1.4 / 2 x 1.8 / 2.4	77 x 52	75 x 49	aegaustralia.com.au
90	75	85	82	0.27	✓	✓	✓	6	10+	2.1	90 x 52	75 x 49	highland.com.au
90	75	85	79	1.01				4	2 x 11 / 2 x 14.5	2 x 1.4 / 2 x 2.3	59 x 52	56 x 49	omegaappliances.com.au
90	75	85	80	0.88	✓(A)	✓	✓	3	10 / 14 / 12 / 18	1.4 / 2 x 1.8 / 2.2	58 x 51	56 x 49	samsung.com.au
85	75	85	79	0.30				4	2 x 12.5 / 2 x 14.5	2 x 1.2 / 2 x 2.3	59 x 52	56 x 49	belliniappliances.com.au
90	75	85	77	0.61				4	2 x 11 / 2 x 14.5	2 x 1.4 / 2 x 2.3	58 x 51	55 x 48	delonghi.com.au
90	65	85	71	0.68	✓			4	10-14 / 2 x 14-18 / 18-24	1.4 / 2 x 1.8 / 2.2	58 x 51	56 x 49	euromaid.com.au
90	75	70	67	0.70		✓	✓	4	14.5 / 18 / 18 (28) / 21 (C)	1.4 / 1.8 / 1.8 - 2.8 / 2.2	60 x 54	56 x 49	sampfordixl.com.au

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Scores The overall score is made up of cooking performance (60%) and ease of use (40%). Cooking performance made up of simmering, turn down and high heat scores (equally weighted). **Dimensions / installation** as these greatly vary depending on what the cooktop is being installed over – cabinetry shelves, for example, or drawers or an oven. Check the installation manual or the manufacturer to ensure your set-up complies with **(B)** Unbridged; 25 for bridged zones. **(C)** Dual element.

Budget

The **Ikea** and **Bellini** models prove induction cooktops can come at a budget price without sacrificing good performance. At this price point you generally won't get features such as flexible cooking zones, auto heat-up or a keep-warm function (neither model has these). The Ikea's controls are faintly labelled and too close to the cooking zones, and there's only one control for all zones. The Bellini's controls are also too close to the cooking zones.

87%
Ikea Nutid HIN4T

81%
Bellini BDI604SG-F

Middle of the road

The Omega and DeLonghi are both very good performers and cost less than many other models, though they aren't in the same value range as the Ikea and Bellini. They're similar when it comes to cooking performance, element size and layout. A key difference between them is that the Omega has a booster function on all four elements, while the DeLonghi only has it on the two large elements. The controls of both models are too close to the cooking zones; the Omega has only one control for all zones, while the DeLonghi's controls are a little confusing at first and you may need the manual. Neither model has flexible cooking zones.

82%
Omega OI64Z

For more information on induction cooktops' pros and cons, dos and don'ts and electromagnetic fields, log on to **choice.com.au/induction cooktops**

81%
DeLonghi DEIND604

ABOUT THE REST

The **Euromaid** and **Neff** are good overall and worth considering. But given the consistently higher scores we've found with other models, we don't recommend them. The Euromaid is only OK for turn-down cooking, where food (such as rice) is cooked initially at a high temperature then turned down to a simmer. Other induction cooktops deliver perfect rice in this test but the Euromaid makes slightly mushy rice, as well as leaving some stuck to the bottom of the pan.

The **Neff** isn't easy to use. Its smaller elements are positioned at the back, which can be awkward as you're more likely to use these for sauces and other dishes that need stirring and you don't want to have to reach over other pots. It has a single control for all elements, which includes a magnetic disc called a "Tipp pad" as the selector and dial. This is removable to allow easy cleaning of the glass, but it's also possible to misplace it. You can still use the controls without it, but we think the more typical touch controls of other models are a better idea.

The glass surface on both these cooktops sits on a stainless steel strip that can trap dirt. ■

Fridge

Pairing up

Pigeon pairs give you more freezer space, but this comes at a price, as **Corinna Horrigan** discovers

Most fridges have limited freezer space; even side-by-side models rarely have more than 250L. If you're looking for more freezer space and have a lot of room in your kitchen, you may be tempted to buy a "pigeon pair" – a matching fresh food-only fridge and upright freezer.

CHOICE checked out three pigeon pairs in about the same price bracket as a large refrigerator – a relatively low price range for this combination. The table (page 58) shows the results for the pigeon pairs and for the standalone fridges themselves. See *CHOICE* Oct 13 or choice.com.au/freezers for information on the freezers alone.

Despite the bonus freezer space of pigeon-pair models, we were disappointed by the lack of versatility of their fresh food space, especially the relatively small crispers. The temperature and overall performance of the pairs is similar to that of large fridges, but none performed well enough to make our recommended list (see right). Even for the smallest combination, the cost of running the two appliances is considerably more than a large fridge freezer. That said, a pigeon pair might be more cost effective than running a fridge/freezer and another freezer, depending on the energy efficiency of each appliance.

None of the newly tested fridges make our recommended list either.

Freezer

WHAT TO BUY

These are the best fridges in each size range, with an overall score of at least 75% and a minimum of 60% for all aspects of temperature performance except the recommended setting score. We exclude this because you can change the recommended setting to get a better result.

For profiles of the models in the What to Buy list, see the *CHOICE* issue indicated in brackets.

381L-450L

Fisher & Paykel
E402BRE3* (B) (Mar 13) $1639

Fisher & Paykel
E442BRE3* (B) (Mar 13) $1589

451L-525L

Fisher & Paykel
RF522WDRX1 (B) (Mar 13) $2009

Fisher & Paykel
E522BRE3* (B) (Mar 13) $1709

SIDE-BY-SIDE

LG GC-P197DPSL
(Sept 12) $1999

B Freezer on bottom.
* Replaced by the 4 series (E402BRE4), which is the same except the control panel has been moved to the inside front right.

For how we test, see **choice.com.au/fridges** and for information on what to look for see *CHOICE*, Jul 13, page 59

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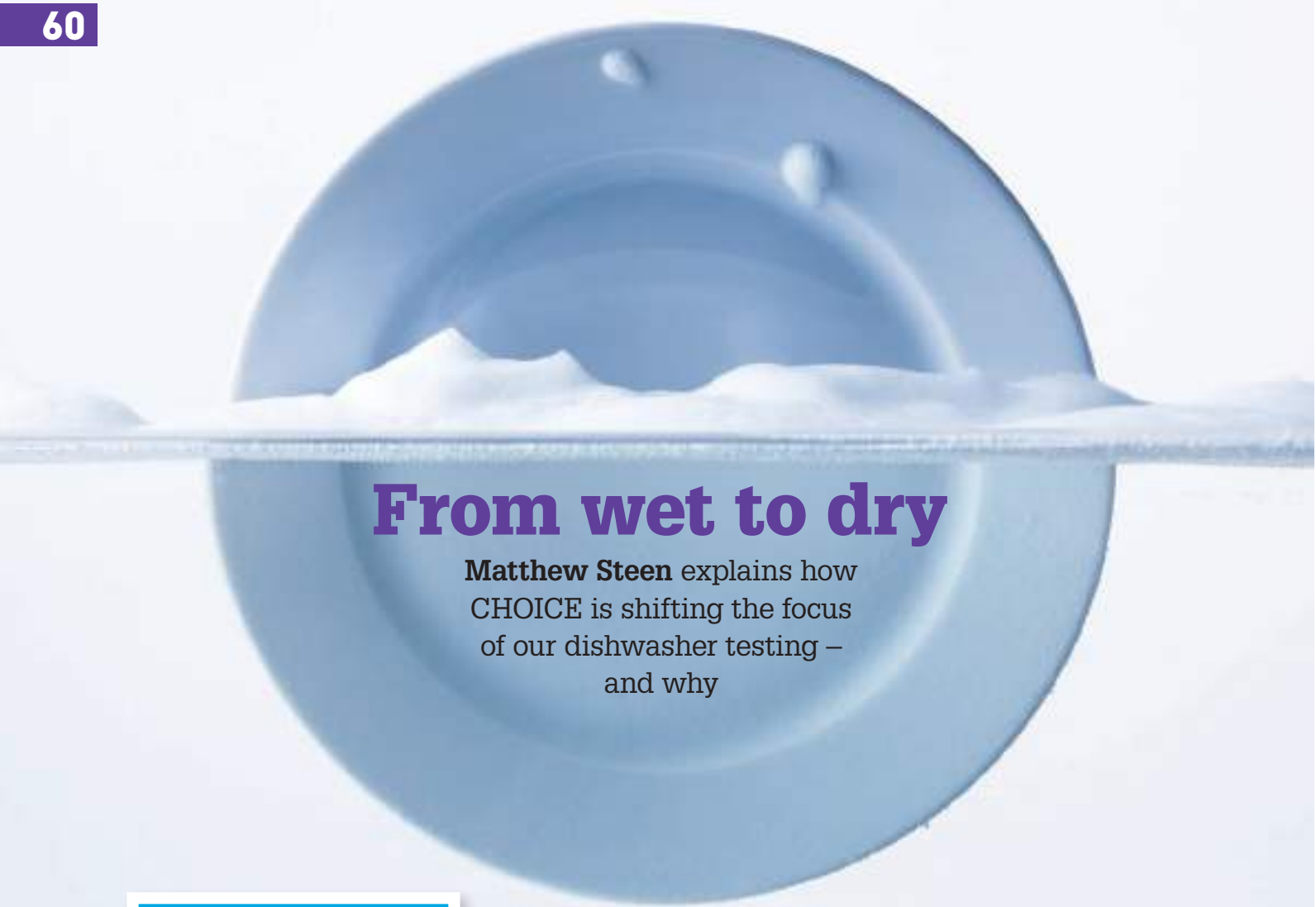
		COSTS		PERFORMANCE											
		Price ($)	10-year running costs ($)	Overall score (%)	Freezer	Number of doors	Temperature performance (%)	Fluctuation (%)	Range (%)	Uniformity (%)	Ambient change (%)	Recommended setting (%)	Energy efficiency (%)	Claimed / measured energy use (kWh / year)	Noise level (dB)
< 300L	**LG** GN-253VW	699	1097	65	T	2	61	45	70	70	58	80	81	435 / 422	47
	Haier HRFZ-213	499	933	53	T	2	45	65	48	60	5	0	83	375 / 359	31
	Westinghouse WTM2000WC	619	796	47	T	2	37	35	70	50	15	40	87	360 / 306	37
	Fisher & Paykel E249TR	779	1087	43	T	2	34	0	35	50	63	50	81	394 / 418	35
300 - 380L	**Samsung** SRL322MW	899	1204	72	B	2	70	70	40	90	87	75	82	460 / 463	36
	LG GC-305PS	899	1191	71	B	2	68	60	75	85	51	85	82	476 / 458	34
	Fisher & Paykel E331T	969	1118	67	T	2	63	45	80	75	69	85	83	405 / 430	31
	Fisher & Paykel E381TRT2	959	1095	62	T	2	56	30	85	75	70	70	85	417 / 421	30
381-450 L	**Fisher & Paykel** E402BRE3 (A)	1639	1186	81	B	2	80	75	90	70	86	75	84	505 / 456	31
	Fisher & Paykel E442BRE3 (A)	1589	1284	81	B	2	80	75	90	70	83	90	83	525 / 494	31
	Electrolux EBM4300SC	1959	1027	75	B	2	72	70	90	55	69	75	88	406 / 395	33
	Electrolux ETM4407SC	2589	918	72	T	2	68	75	90	65	33	70	90	369 / 353	37
	•**Mitsubishi** MR-C405C-W-A1	1210	1451	72	B	3	71	80	65	50	83	90	76	515 / 558	31
	Westinghouse WBM4300WB	1529	1375	72	B	2	70	75	85	55	66	50	81	530 / 529	37
	Midea HD-496FWS	799	1292	69	T	2	66	80	75	65	49	0	82	456 / 497	35
	•**Westinghouse** WTM3900WB-R	1379	1110	69	T	2	65	60	85	70	38	75	85	450 / 427	37
	Whirlpool WRIBP41WC	999	1048	67	T	2	62	65	80	70	33	30	87	465 / 403	36
	•**Kelvinator** KTM4200WB-R	1459	1209	65	T	2	60	65	65	70	28	85	84	469 / 465	39
451-525 L	**Fisher & Paykel** RF522WDRX1 (A)	2009	1368	83	B	2	83	75	85	80	95	85	84	540 / 526	28
	Fisher & Paykel E522BRE3 (A)	1709	1399	81	B	2	81	75	85	85	78	90	83	540 / 538	33
	Electrolux EBM5100SC	2379	1043	74	B	2	70	70	80	65	62	80	89	428 / 401	34
	Electrolux EBM5107SC	2849	1097	74	B	2	71	70	75	65	70	70	88	428 / 422	32
	Westinghouse WBM5100WC	1899	1352	72	B	2	69	80	90	35	57	75	84	532 / 520	35
	•**Bosch** KGN53X125A	1279	1196	71	B	2	67	90	55	80	52	0	85	448 / 460	37
	Panasonic NR-BW465VWAU	1499	1022	71	B	2	67	80	55	75	54	65	88	422 / 393	28
	Westinghouse WBE5100SC	2379	1396	71	B	2	68	55	90	65	56	90	83	532 / 537	34
	Kelvinator KTM5200WB	1479	1266	69	T	2	65	75	65	75	34	80	85	518 / 487	35
<525 & FD	**Fisher & Paykel** RF610ADUX3	3399	1643	76	B	3	74	55	85	80	78	90	82	645 / 632	32
	LG GR-L730SL	3599	1882	75	B	3	73	70	82	50	85	85	81	774 / 724	35
	LG GR-L219CSL	3499	1760	74	B	4	73	80	70	70	64	85	79	750 / 677	35
	Electrolux EQE6007SB-NAU	3699	1708	70	B	4	67	40	85	90	85	70	84	616 / 661	34
	Samsung SRF527DSLS	2299	1492	52	B	3	45	10	85	65	81	75	82	637 / 574	39
SIDE-BY-SIDE	**LG** GC-P197DPSL	1999	1609	81	L	2	81	90	85	65	79	75	82	638 / 619	37
	Daewoo FRS-U20ICW	1399	1729	74	L	2	72	60	80	75	74	90	81	650 / 665	38
	Westinghouse WSE6100WF	2009	1550	72	L	2	69	55	85	45	90	75	84	605 / 596	36
	Westinghouse WSE7000WF	2329	1708	64	L	2	59	45	85	45	85	50	83	637 / 657	40
	Samsung SRS600NLS	1999	1690	55	L	2	49	25	90	55	67	60	81	672 / 650	35
PIGEON PAIRS	•**Westinghouse** WRM3700WB-R/WFM3600WB-L	3348	2080	74	na	2	73	65	80	60	85	85	80	1019 / 800	na
	•**Fisher & Paykel** E450R/E388LW	2998	2460	69	na	2	67	55	90	55	70	55	75	951/947	na
	•**Fisher & Paykel** C270R/EL210L	2008	2249	57	na	2	57	60	80	40	56	0	57	843 / 865	na
FRIDGE ONLY	•**Westinghouse** WRM3700WB-R	1319	848	81	na	1	79	75	75	75	90	85	89	353 / 326	39
	•**Fisher & Paykel** E450R	1499	879	78	na	1	75	75	75	75	70	90	90	335 / 338	40
	•**Fisher & Paykel** C270R	929	980	66	na	1	62	70	75	55	56	0	83	362 / 377	32

		FEATURES				SPECIFICATIONS							
Brand reliability	Brand loyalty	Chiller	Dairy compartment	Rollers	All shelves removable at 90°	Dimensions (cm, H x W x D)	Claimed total volume (L)	Claimed volume, fresh food (L)	Claimed volume, freezer (L)	Crisper drawer	Fresh food shelves / shelf positions	Door hinge position	Contact
86	90	✓				161 x 54 x 60	253	179	74	1	2/4	R	lg.com.au
na	na			✓		144 x 55 x 58	213	172	41	1	3 / 8	R	haier.com.au
92	94	✓		✓	✓	148 x 52 x 60	203	144	59	1	3/5	Rev	westinghouse.com.au
90	92		✓			160 x 53 x 58	248	191	57	1	3/11	R	fp.com.au
86	91			✓		178 x 60 x 65	324	209	115	1	3/7	Rev	samsung.com.au
86	90			✓		173 x 60 x 66	305	183	122	1	2/4	R	lg.com.au
90	92		✓	✓		143 x 64 x 71	329	232	97	1	2/13	Rev	fp.com.au
90	92		✓	✓	✓	160 x 64 x 72	380	283	97	1	3/17	R	fp.com.au
90	92		✓	✓		170 x 64 x 72	403	280	123	2	3/17	R or L	fp.com.au
90	92		✓	✓		170 x 68 x 72	442	307	135	2	3/18	R or L	fp.com.au
93	95	✓	✓	✓		172 x 71 x 71	430	300	131	1	2/8	R or L	electrolux.com.au
93	95		✓	✓		172 x 70 x 75	442	339	103	1	3/17	R or L	electrolux.com.au
na	na	✓		✓	✓	180 x 60 x 66	406	227	103	1	3/5	R	mitsubishielectric.com.au
92	94		✓	✓		172 x 70 x 71	431	300	131	1	3/10	R or L	westinghouse.com.au
na	na			✓		172 x 70 x 70	410	302	108	1	2/11	R	mideabrand.com
92	94		✓	✓		172 x 71 x 65	390	302	91	1	3/12	R	westinghouse.com.au
80	86			✓	✓	166 x 70 x 71	410	302	108	1	2/5	R	whirlpool.com.au
93	94		✓	✓		164 x 71 x 71	420	313	103	1	3/10	R	kelvinator.com.au
90	92		✓	✓		172 x 79 x 70	519	360	159	2	3/17	R or L	fp.com.au
90	92		✓	✓		170 x 79 x 72	519	360	159	2	3/17	R or L	fp.com.au
93	95		✓	✓	✓	172 x 81 x 75	510	349	156	2	2/8	R or L	electrolux.com.au
93	95	✓	✓	✓		171 x 79 x 62	505	349	156	2	2/8	R	electrolux.com.au
92	94		✓	✓	✓	172 x 79 x 71	510	349	156	2	3/10	R or L	westinghouse.com.au
na	na	✓			✓	170 x 70 x 75	452	323	70	2	3/4	Rev	bosch.com.au
na	na	✓		✓	✓	177 x 68 x 71	465	338	127	1	2/4	R	panasonic.com.au
92	94		✓	✓	✓	172 x 81 x 71	510	352	158	2	3/10	R	westinghouse.com.au
93	94		✓	✓	✓	172 x 81 x 71	520	396	121	2	3/12	R	kelvinator.com.au
90	92		✓	✓	✓	179 x 90 x 70	610	433	181	2	2/14	na	fp.com.au
86	90	(B)	✓	✓	✓	179 x 91 x 72	730	452	250	2	4/8 (D)	na	lg.com.au
86	90	✓	✓	✓	✓	178 x 91 x 77	610	402	196	2	2/14	na	lg.com.au
93	95	✓	✓	✓	✓	172 x 89 x 82	602	370	232	2	2/4	na	electrolux.com.au
86	91		✓	✓		178 x 82 x 77	527	352	175	2	2/4	na	samsung.com.au
86	90		✓	✓		176 x 90 x 73	567	353	214	0	3/8	na	lg.com.au
na	na	(C)	✓	✓		179 x 90 x 73	618	377	241	2	3/6	na	daewooelectronics.com.au
92	94		✓	✓		177 x 90 x 75	606	357	249	2	3/12	na	westinghouse.com.au
92	94	✓	✓	✓		176 x 100 x 74	700	450	250	2	3/11	na	westinghouse.com.au
86	91		✓	✓		179 x 91 x 72	600	363	237	2	4/9	na	samsung.com.au
92	94		✓	✓		172 x 151 x 66	730	370	360	1	4/21	na	westinghouse.com.au
90	92		✓	✓		170 x 128 x 72	840	451	389	1	4/32	na	fp.com.au
90	92		✓		✓	160 x 106 x 58	479	266	213	1	5/19	na	fp.com.au
92	94		✓	✓		172 x 61 x 66	370	370	na	1	4/21	R	westinghouse.com.au
90	92		✓	✓		170 x 64 x 72	451	451	na	1	4/32	R	fp.com.au
90	92		✓		✓	160 x 53 x 57	266	266	na	1	5/19	R	fp.com.au

USING THE TABLE Price Recommended retail, as of February 2014. Many fridges are available in other styles and finishes, at a different price. Some can also be built into cabinets with a door kit that matches your kitchen cupboards. **Scores** The overall score consists of temperature performance (80%) and energy efficiency (20%). **Temperature performance** This score consists of fluctuations (30%), range (25%), uniformity (20%), ambient change (20%) and recommended setting (5%). **Features** See *CHOICE*, Jul 13, page 59. **Energy efficiency** is based on the fridge's energy consumption, taking into account its size. **Noise level** These are comparative measurements taken 1m up and 1m away from the fridge during normal running. Fridges can sound noticeably louder as the compressor starts and stops and may make unusual noises during automatic defrosting. **Claimed volumes** This is how much air space the fridge has to cool; less space is available for storage. Use the volumes to get an idea of how big the freezer is compared with the fresh-food compartment. **10-year running costs** are calculated at a rate of 26c/kWh. A 10-year period gives a useful indication of the long-term differences between high and low energy use – and you should expect your fridge to last at least this long. **TABLE NOTES** • Newly tested. **na** Not applicable – doors are side-by-side. **Rev** Reversible door. **(A)** Fisher & Paykel claim the only difference between the 3 series and 4 series currently available is the control panel being moved to the inside front right. **(B)** Variable temperature drawer can be set as a chiller. **(C)** This chiller was too warm in our tests for optimal storage of highly perishable foods. **(D)** Four half-width shelves. **T** Top. **B** Bottom. **L** Left. **R** Right.



From wet to dry

Matthew Steen explains how CHOICE is shifting the focus of our dishwasher testing – and why

Nutshell

- Twelve new dishwashers on test, one of which is recommended.
- CHOICE has changed how we test dishwashers to better reflect your usage and expectations.

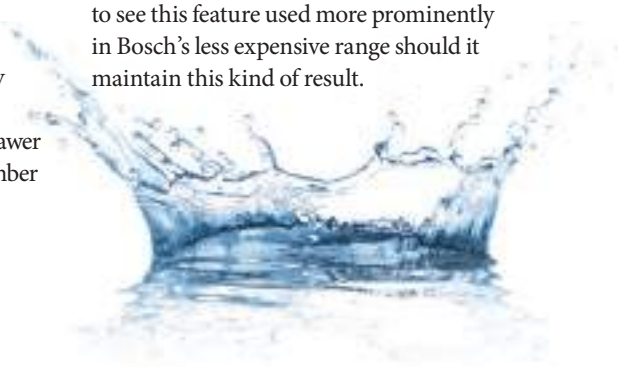
As we recently found out in our washing-up liquids research (see *CHOICE*, Feb 14), the average Australian household uses 31.2L of water per day in the kitchen sink. Since most households don't have a dishwasher, chances are much of this water is being used for washing up rather than washing hands.

It's been a long time since CHOICE has come across a dishwasher using 32L of water in its wash cycle. In fact, the average water use for a conventional dishwasher these days is around 13.5L per wash cycle. It's for this reason, plus the fact that many of our members are more interested in knowing how well a dishwasher will dry their cutlery and plates, that we've removed the water efficiency component from our scoring. We'll still show how much water a dishwasher uses on a cycle, but we've reallocated the score weighting that was for water efficiency to drying performance instead.

We've also tightened up our energy efficiency scoring so there is less bias towards smaller machines such as drawer and slimline types. We go by the number of place settings used in testing rather than the claimed number of place settings – which is rarely what you'd use in real life.

Zeolite's alright

We recently tested a Bosch SMS69T28AU dishwasher (opposite) that uses zeolite (see *CHOICE*, Nov 13). Zeolite is a mineral that "naturally absorb[s] water molecules and then release[s] them as energy". Simply put, it helps the drying process, which you can see from the Bosch's very good drying results (page 62). We'd be keen to see this feature used more prominently in Bosch's less expensive range should it maintain this kind of result.



WHAT TO BUY

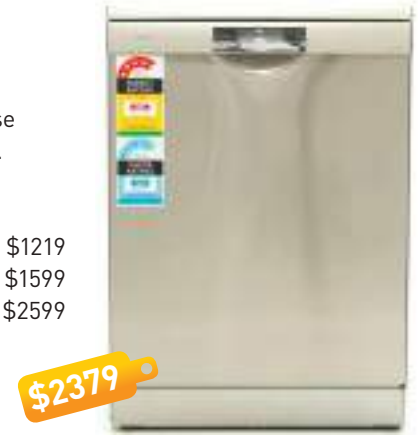
PREVIOUSLY RECOMMENDED

Our recommended models all score at least 75% overall, 70% for wash performance and 80% for drying. LG and Westinghouse don't have as high a reliability rating as Miele. For profiles of these dishwashers, refer to the *CHOICE* issue in brackets.

STANDARD

78% Westinghouse WSU6603XR (Aug 13)	$1219
77% LG LD1454TFES2 (Apr 13)	$1599
77% Miele G5715 SCU XXL CS (Aug 13)	$2599

STANDARD



75%

Bosch SMS69T28AU

Good points

- Very good drying score
- Good energy efficiency
- Has auto wash
- Cheap to run
- Relatively quiet

Bad points

- Delicates/glassware program not logically named

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Will your **normal dishes fit into the dishwasher** without crowding or hitting the spray arms? Take a few large dinner plates and tall glasses to the store to check they both fit at the same time. Spin the spray arms to make sure they don't hit anything.

Auto program/dirt sensor programs are designed to optimise the amount of energy, water, time and temperature needed. But our research shows very few actually work.

Easy-to-lift height-adjustable top basket Almost all top baskets are height-adjustable, but if it is an easy-adjust system you can do this without removing the basket. Only a few can be adjusted when loaded. But larger internal tubs often denoted by XL or XXL in the model number means that adjustable baskets may not be required – but they still can improve versatility.

Eco wash programs mostly save on energy by washing at lower temperatures, and are ideal for use with enzyme-based detergents.

Fold-down/removable plate racks can help when loading pots and awkward items. Fold-down types don't need external storage when not in use.

An anti-flood hose has an electric cut-off near the water tap connection, which means it stops leaks in the hose, not just in the machine. An anti-flood hose is high-level protection.

Half-load option is a program or option that may save water, time, and energy when washing half a load. With some models you can focus the wash to one basket. It's handy for washing a smaller load daily, so the dishwasher doesn't get smelly. Models with auto program/dirt sensor should automatically do this, but models with a tick in this column have a specific program or option label as such.

Cutlery trays are good for large utensils, and cutlery can be grouped on the tray as you load the machine, making unloading easier (though you can do this with baskets too). They may be safer due to reducing the risk of stabs from knives or forks in standard cutlery baskets. Our results show they don't necessarily wash better than a cutlery basket. It's also worth noting that machines with cutlery trays tend to have shorter heights between racks.

Cutlery basket An anti-nesting grid helps stop the cutlery pieces from nesting, to enable a better wash. For added versatility, look for a cutlery basket that can be placed anywhere in the bottom basket.

A **concealed heating element** stops items being damaged if they fall through the basket and also means food cannot drop onto the element and cause a burning smell. Generally, it's rare for dishwashers not to have one.

Controls and labelling The controls should be easy to use and the labelling intuitive and clear. Look for engraved or etched labels on stainless steel so they don't come off when cleaning.

Fast wash or glasses programs are suitable for lightly soiled dishes, or if you rinse first (which we don't believe you need to do).

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

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Log on to **choice.com.au/dishwashers** for information on how we test

USING THE TABLE Price Recommended retail, as of February 2014. **Scores** The overall score is made up of washing performance (65%), drying performance (25%) and energy efficiency (10%). **Noise** is measured 1m away and 1m up from the dishwasher, which is placed within cabinetry. The noise level varies depending on kitchen layout, but our reading gives a comparative measure. A difference of 3dB is noticeable to the human ear. **Features** See What to Look For, page 61. **Water connection H or C** You can connect the dishwasher to hot or cold water. Connecting to hot water is likely to shorten the cycle time, but you may lose program versatility. You may need a tempering valve to connect to solar hot water, as the inlet temperature generally should not exceed 60°C. **C rec** The manufacturer recommends connecting to a cold tap, and the dishwasher heats the water itself (all dishwashers have a heater). **C only** You can only connect the dishwasher to a cold tap. **Type FW** Freestanding, with a worktop (can generally be inbuilt as well). **BI** Built in – might not have top or side panels; must be enclosed and anchored to prevent it from tipping forward when fully loaded and dish racks are pulled out. **SI** Semi-integrated – a built-in type for which you can fit a panel to the door under the control fascia to match the rest of your kitchen cupboard doors. **FI** Fully integrated – built in, with the whole front matching your kitchen and the controls inside the door. **Running costs** This is an estimate of how much the dishwasher will cost over 10 years for water and electricity if you wash a full load every day using a normal or auto-sensing cycle, based on 26c per kWh for electricity and $2 per 1000L water. The largest running cost will be the cost of detergent, which can vary significantly, so it's not factored in these calculations. **TABLE NOTES** • Newly tested. * Where possible, we've listed the white (**W**) model code and price. Most models are available in other colours, finishes or types – usually at a higher price. The colour listed for **SI** models is for the control panel. **SS** Indicates any metallic or metallic-look finish; not all models are actually stainless steel. **na** Not applicable. **Brand reliability and loyalty** This information is taken from our brand reliability survey, but not added to the overall score. These scores refer to the brand only, not the particular model.

		COSTS		PERFORMANCE				
		Price ($)*	Running cost ($ / 10 years)	Overall score (%)	Washing performance (%)	Drying performance (%)	Energy efficiency (%)	Energy used (kWh)
STANDARD	**Westinghouse** WSU6603XR	1219	1595	78	81	80	51	1.54
	LG LD1454TFES2	1599	1142	77	76	84	69	1.09
	Miele G5715 SCU XXL CS	2599	1221	77	74	88	65	1.19
	Dishlex DX301SK	1109	1552	76	80	76	53	1.48
	Westinghouse WSF6605WR	949	1528	76	80	76	52	1.50
	Bosch SMS63M18AU	1399	1111	75	77	74	69	1.08
	• **Bosch** SMS69T28AU	2379	988	75	71	87	75	0.95
	Whirlpool ADP5000WH	649	865	75	85	48	81	0.80
	AEG F77000WOP	1099	1628	74	73	87	50	1.57
	Bosch SMS40M02AU	999	1083	74	74	75	71	1.05
	Bosch SMS68M12AU	1299	1099	74	74	76	70	1.07
	LG LD1452WFEN2	999	1114	74	73	77	71	1.04
	• **Miele** G 4420 Sci	1699	1391	74	73	84	58	1.36
	Miele G5935 SCi XXL	3799	1180	74	72	81	67	1.14
	Bosch SMU68M15AU	1499	1123	73	74	73	69	1.09
	Dishlex DX103WK	739	1627	73	76	75	51	1.54
	• **Miele** G 4220	1199	1479	73	73	82	55	1.43
	Siemens SN46M582AU	1599	1180	73	72	77	69	1.08
	Asko D5424WH	999	1028	72	76	62	74	0.97
	• **LG** LD-1485T4	1792	1233	72	73	73	65	1.18
	Bosch SMS69T12AU	1749	1073	71	72	68	71	1.03
	Fisher & Paykel DD60DCW7	1579	1309	71	70	81	56	1.24
	Miele G5500 SCU	2199	1377	71	70	80	59	1.34
	Fisher & Paykel DW60CCW1	849	1471	70	72	71	57	1.38
	Ariston LBF51	599	1373	69	71	67	60	1.30
	Asko D5532	1499	927	68	69	60	79	0.85
	• **LG** LD-1482W4	1199	1226	68	69	68	66	1.17
	Asko D5434	1299	708	67	73	43	87	0.64
	Bosch SMS50E32AU	779	756	67	73	45	85	0.70
	• **Electrolux** ESF6700ROW	1279	1413	67	68	68	56	1.41
	Fisher & Paykel DW60CEX1	819	1272	67	66	73	63	1.23
	Asko D5644	1799	760	65	68	48	86	0.67
	• **Beko** DSFN 6835	1079	1320	65	69	55	62	1.26
	• **Samsung** DW5343TGBWQ	849	708	65	72	38	87	0.66
	• **Emilia** EDW62SS	699	860	64	68	48	80	0.82
	• **Samsung** DW-FG725L	1299	1458	64	74	40	56	1.41
	• **Ikea** Bespara DWHB81-2	799	678	62	67	40	89	0.61
	• **Omega** ODW702WB	649	886	61	61	53	79	0.85
COMPACT / SLIMLINE	**Bosch** SPU63M05AU	1199	906	72	75	72	57	0.86
	Miele G4570 SCVi	1999	1090	72	74	77	45	1.05
	Fisher & Paykel DD60SCW7	900	679	69	68	78	54	0.66
	Fisher & Paykel DD60SDFTX7	1210	698	69	69	76	54	0.66

			BRAND		FEATURES							SPECIFICATIONS					
Water used (L)	Noise (dB)	Cycle time (min)	Brand reliability (%)	Brand loyalty (%)	Auto program / dirt sensor	Easy-to-lift, height-adjustable top basket	Fold-down / removable plate racks	Anti-flood hose	Half-load option	Eco wash	Fast wash	Dimensions (cm, H x W x D)	Water connection	Place settings	Type*	Colour*	Contact
19	43	144	82	86	✓	✓/✓	✓/-	✓		✓	✓	82 x 60 x 58	C only	13	BI	SS	westinghouse.com.au
15	47	157	76	84	✓	✓/✓	✓/-	✓	✓	✓	✓	85 x 60 x 60	H or C	14	FW	SS	lg.com.au
13	46	140	89	94	✓	✓/✓	✓/-	✓		✓	✓	85 x 60 x 57	H or C	15	BI	SS	miele.com.au
20	51	112	81	83	✓	✓/✓	✓/-			✓	✓	85 x 60 x 61	H or C	12	FW	SS	dishlex.com.au
14	46	138	82	86	✓	✓/✓	✓/-	✓		✓	✓	85 x 60 x 62	C rec	13	FW	W	westinghouse.com.au
12	41	133	89	93	✓	✓/✓	✓/-	✓	✓	✓	✓	85 x 60 x 60	C only	14	FW	SS	bosch.com.au
12	42	121	89	93	✓	✓/✓	✓/-	✓		✓	✓	84 x 60 x 57	H or C	15	FW	SS	bosch.com.au
13	52	132	69	61		✓/✓	✓/-	✓			✓	85 x 60 x 59	H or C	12	FW	W	whirlpool.com.au
19	42	155	86	90	✓	✓/✓	✓/-	✓		✓	✓	85 x 60 x 61	H or C	14	FW	W	aegaustralia.com.au
12	43	127	89	93	✓	✓/✓	✓/-	✓	✓	✓	✓	85 x 60 x 60	C only	14	FW	W	bosch.com.au
11	43	127	89	93	✓	✓/✓	✓/-	✓	✓	✓	✓	85 x 60 x 60	C only	15	FW	W	bosch.com.au
16	50	157	76	84	✓	✓/✓	✓/-	✓	✓	✓	✓	85 x 60 x 60	H or C	14	FW	W	lg.com.au
14	40	136	89	94	✓	✓/✓	-/-	✓		✓	✓	81 x 60 x 57	H or C	14	SI	SS	miele.com.au
13	48	129	89	94	✓	✓/✓	✓/✓	✓			✓	85 x 60 x 57	H or C	15	SI	SS	miele.com.au
12	41	134	89	93	✓	✓/✓	✓/-	✓	✓	✓	✓	82 x 60 x 57	C only	15	SI	SS	bosch.com.au
23	48	112	81	83		-/✓	-/-			✓	✓	85 x 60 x 61	H or C	12	FW	W	dishlex.com.au
17	42	133	89	94	✓	✓/✓	-/-	✓		✓	✓	85 x 60 x 60	H or C	14	FW	W	miele.com.au
12	45	129	na	na	✓	✓/✓	✓/-	✓		✓	✓	82 x 60 x 57	C only	15	BI	SS	siemens-home.com.au
14	55	105	86	93		-/-	-/-			✓	✓	82 x 60 x 55	H or C	14	SI	W	asko.com.au
16	42	186	76	84	✓	✓/✓	✓/-	✓	✓	✓	✓	85 x 60 x 60	H or C	14	FW	SS	lg.com.au
12	47	126	89	93	✓	✓/✓	✓/-	✓	✓	✓	✓	82 x 60 x 57	C only	15	FW	W	bosch.com.au
16	49	125	72	83		na	✓/✓			✓	✓	82 x 60 x 59	C rec	14	BI	W	fp.com.au
14	49	137	89	94	✓	✓/✓	✓/-	✓		✓	✓	81 x 60 x 57	H or C	14	BI	W	miele.com.au
19	51	130	72	83	✓	✓/✓	✓/-			✓	✓	85 x 60 x 60	C rec	14	FW	W	fp.com.au
16	50	127	na	na		-/✓	-/-			✓	✓	85 x 60 x 60	H or C	14	FW	W	aristonbrand.com
14	53	129	86	93		-/-	-/-			✓	✓	82 x 60 x 55	H or C	14	FI	na	asko.com.au
16	42	189	76	84	✓	✓/✓	✓/-	✓	✓	✓	✓	85 x 60 x 60	H or C	14	FW	W	lg.com.au
14	44	102	86	93		-/-	✓/-			✓	✓	82 x 60 x 55	H or C	14	BI	W	asko.com.au
13	45	135	89	93	✓	-/✓	✓/-	✓	✓		✓	82 x 60 x 60	C only	14	FW	W	bosch.com.au
10	44	150	80	83	✓	✓/✓	✓/-	✓		✓	✓	85 x 60 x 61	H or C	14	FW	W	electrolux.com.au
12	52	121	72	83		-/✓	✓/-			✓	✓	85 x 60 x 60	C rec	14	FW	SS	fp.com.au
14	49	112	86	93		✓/✓	✓/-			✓	✓	82 x 60 x 55	H or C	14	BI	SS	asko.com.au
14	46	153	na	na	✓	-/✓	✓/-	✓		✓	✓	85 x 60 x 60	C only	14	FW	W	beko.com.au
11	40	154	na	na		✓/✓	✓/-	✓	✓		✓	85 x 60 x 60	H or C	13	FW	W	samsung.com.au
12	47	116	na	na		✓/✓	✓/✓	✓			✓	85 x 60 x 58	C only	12	FW	SS	emiliaappliances.com.au
17	40	163	na	na	✓	✓/✓	✓/-	✓	✓		✓	85 x 60 x 60	H or C	15	FW	SS	samsung.com.au
14	47	66	na	na		✓/✓	✓/-		✓	✓	✓	82 x 60 x 57	H or C	12	FI	na	ikea.com.au
10	45	138	na	na		✓/✓	✓/-	✓	✓		✓	85 x 60 x 60	H or C	12	FW	W	omegaappliances.com.au
11	47	121	89	93	✓	✓/✓	✓/-	✓	✓	✓	✓	82 x 45 x 57	C only	10	BI	SS	bosch.com.au
12	46	93	89	94	✓	✓/✓	✓/✓	✓		✓	✓	81 x 45 x 57	H or C	10	FI	na	miele.com.au
8	48	125	72	83		na	✓/✓			✓	✓	41 x 60 x 59	C rec	7	BI	W	fp.com.au
8	49	124	72	83		na	✓/✓			✓	✓	41 x 60 x 59	C rec	7	BI	SS	fp.com.au

The steam room

Rebecca Ciaramidaro checks out your options for that love-or-hate task of ironing

Steam irons

If you aren't a particularly keen ironer, don't worry – you're not alone. You're also probably best suited to a traditional steam iron. They're a less expensive alternative to steam stations, and there are plenty to choose from, at varying prices, that will get the job done.

We put 15 steam irons to the test, and found that while not much has changed in terms of features and design since we last tested them (see *CHOICE*, Aug 12), one does stand out for design innovation – the Tefal Freemove Cordless FV9920. It's a 2400W cordless iron with a base station that sits on your ironing board. Once it's ready to go it lasts for about 20 seconds away from the base before it beeps. This

The Freemove takes a long time to iron different fabrics

lets you know that it's time to place the iron back on the base station, where it charges for four seconds before it's ready to use again.

Sadly, while the idea of a cordless iron sounds great, we found that in practice the Freemove takes a long time to iron different fabrics, with minimal steam being produced at all temperature settings. It's the lowest-scoring model overall, performing poorly when ironing organza, silk and wool and only OK for cotton, denim and linen.

Since testing and publishing results for the Sunbeam Verve 68 Resilium SR6800, we've received many negative comments about this iron, in particular regarding leaking water. In this test we decided to include the technically similar updated version, the Sunbeam Verve 68 Resilium SR6850. Once again we found this model performs well – much the same as the previously tested model – so it's possible the faults develop after prolonged use. We'll continue to test this iron to see if the issue arises and will report back with any updates.

WHAT TO BUY

93%
Philips PerfectCare Azur GC4912/30, $160

86%
Russell Hobbs Steam Glide RHC909, $40

86%
Sunbeam Solus Digital Resilium SR7000, $129

85%
Breville JetSteam Iron BIR300, $70

85%
Sunbeam Verve 68 Resilium SR6850, $119

81%
Panasonic 360° Quick NI-W940C, $109

80%
Philips Azur GC4410/22, $130

80%
Philips Azur GC4412/32, $80

PREVIOUSLY RECOMMENDED

(*CHOICE*, Aug 12)

82% Morphy Richards	
Comfigrip 40857	$130
82% Philips	
PowerLife GC2960	$50
80% Russell Hobbs	
Turbo Steam Iron RHC925	$129

ABOUT THE REST

The **Tefal Ultimate Steam Power 400 FV9604** is poor for ironing organza and silk. Its thermostat control knob isn't easy to adjust, which is also the case for the **Kambrook Steamline Auto Off Iron KI780**, **Target Essentials TESIR30**, **Electrolux** and **Homemaker**. The **Philips Easy Speed Plus GC2040/70** is only OK for ironing silk and wool and borderline for organza. It has a short power cord, as does the Homemaker.

While the **Tefal Freemove Cordless FV9920** has no cord for ironing, the power cord to the base station is short. The Kambrook is poor for ironing organza and linen. The Target Essentials is poor for ironing organza, borderline for wool and OK for silk. Its water level isn't easy to see, which is also the case for the **Tefal FV9604**, **Homemaker** and Tefal Freemove.

The **Electrolux** is borderline for organza and wool and only OK for silk, cotton, denim and linen. The Homemaker is poor for ironing organza and only OK for silk, wool, cotton, denim and linen.

On the plus side, the Kambrook, Target Essentials and Electrolux all have very long power cords.

The **Philips PerfectCareAzur GC4912/30** is the standout model, performing excellently across the range of fabric tests except for linen, where it still performs very well. Our other recommended models are very good performers overall, but the **Sunbeam Solus Digital Resilium SR7000** is only OK at ironing silk, while the **Sunbeam Verve 68 Resilium SR6850**, **Philips Azur GC4410/22** and **Philips Azur GC4412/32** are borderline for ironing organza. They all have automatic shut-off if the iron is left unattended except the Philips Azur GC4410/22. The two Sunbeam irons, **Russell Hobbs**, **Breville** and **Panasonic 360° Quick NI-W940C** have long power cords. Some may find the Philips and Sunbeam irons and the Panasonic too heavy. The water level is difficult to see in the Panasonic and Sunbeam models, while the thermostat control knob isn't easy to adjust for the Panasonic or Sunbeam SR6850.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

IN STEAM IRONS

Shot of steam gives you an extra burst of steam at the push of a button to help subdue stubborn wrinkles.

Self-cleaning means you can set the iron to remove scale deposits that can clog the steam valve and soleplate holes. The shot of steam feature can also help clean vents.

Drip protection prevents water from dripping through the soleplate and potentially staining the fabric, particularly at low temperatures.

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

IN STEAM IRONS & STEAM STATIONS

Weight The iron needs to be comfortable to pick up and hold, with controls that are easy to see and adjust. A lightweight iron is easy to manoeuvre but will require more downward pressure, while a heavier iron will need less pressure but more effort to move and lift.

Soleplate A non-stick soleplate is easier to keep clean than stainless steel, but be careful not to scratch it (for example on zippers) as scratches can cause the iron to drag over time. Polished stainless steel can work well - but it's also susceptible to scratching and staining.

Automatic shut-off cuts off power to the iron after it has been left immobile for a certain period.

Power-on light lets you know when the iron is on and therefore hot.

Variable steam allows you to control the amount of steam while you iron, so you can turn it up when you're trying to get creases out of linen (for example) and turn it down for more sensitive fabrics.

Thermostat lights turn on when the iron is heating up and off when the preset temperature is reached.

A transparent water reservoir makes it easier to see the water level when filling the tank, and know when it's getting low.

Button groove A gap between the iron and soleplate makes it easier to iron around buttons.

Vertical steam allows you to iron heavy items such as curtains or a suit jacket while they're hanging up.

Cord storage Look for a specially designed heel to wrap the cord around and a clip to secure it.

IN STEAM STATIONS

Steam lock mechanism locks the steam supply trigger in position, so you don't have to hold it constantly while ironing. It's convenient if you're doing vertical ironing or ironing a large piece of fabric.

STEAM IRONS		PERFORMANCE			FEATURES					SPECIFICATIONS			
	Price ($)	Overall score (%)	Performance (%)	Ease of use (%)	Claimed soleplate type	Self cleaning	Power on light	Drip protection	Cord storage	Auto shut-off horizontal / vertical (min)	Cord length (m)	Weight (kg)	Stated wattage (W)
• **Philips** PerfectCare Azur GC4912/30	160	93	95	87	Non-stick	✓		ns	✓	2/3	2.5	1.5	2400
• **Russell Hobbs** Steam Glide RHC909	40	86	88	81	Ceramic	✓	✓	✓	✓	0.5/8	3.4	1.1	2220
• **Sunbeam** Solus Digital Resilium SR7000	129	86	88	80	Resilium	✓	✓	✓	✓	0.5/15	3.0	1.4	2400
• **Breville** JetSteam Iron BIR300	70	85	87	81	Teflon	✓	✓	✓		0.5/8	3.0	1.1	2400
• **Sunbeam** Verve 68 Resilium SR6850 (A)	119	85	88	77	Resilium	✓	✓	✓	✓	0.5/15	3.0	1.3	2400
Morphy Richards Comfigrip 40857	130	82	82	81	Ceramic	✓		✓	✓	1/8	3.1	1.3	2200
Philips PowerLife GC2960	50	82	83	80	Non-stick	✓		✓	✓	0.5/8	3.0	1.1	2200
• **Panasonic** 360 ° Quick NI-W940C	109	81	83	76	Ceramic	✓		✓	✓	1/10	3.0	1.4	2400
• **Philips** Azur GC4410/22	130	80	80	80	Non-stick	✓		✓	✓	na	2.5	1.3	2400
• **Philips** Azur GC4412/32	80	80	80	79	Non-stick	✓		✓	✓	2/8	2.5	1.4	2400
Russell Hobbs Turbo Steam Iron RHC925	129	80	82	74	Ceramic	✓	✓	✓	✓	0.5/8	3.3	1.2	2400
Tefal Aquaspeed Autoclean FV5355	120	79	78	80	Ultraguide	✓	✓	✓	✓	0.5/8	2.4	1.3	2400
Sunbeam Verve 65 Platinum SR6550 (B)	90	78	83	66	Teflon		✓	✓		0.5/15	3.0	1.2	2400
Sunbeam Pro Steam SR4100	35	77	83	63	Aluminium			✓		na	3.0	1.0	2100
• **Tefal** Ultimate Steam Power 400 FV9604	159	77	77	77	Gliss/Glide Protect Autoclean	✓	✓	✓	✓	0.5/8	2.5	1.6	2400
Tefal Primaglide FV2530	50	73	73	73	Ultraguide	✓			✓	na	2.0	1.1	2000
• **Philips** Easy Speed Plus GC2040/70	50	72	72	73	Non-stick			✓	✓	na	2.0	1.0	2300
• **Kambrook** Steamline Auto Off Iron KI780	50	70	68	74	Non-stick	✓		✓	✓	0.5/8	3.0	1.0	2000
• **Target Essentials** TESIR30	15	70	65	80	Ceramic	✓		✓	✓	na	3.0	1.0	2200
Panasonic 360° Quick NI-W810CS	99	69	67	74	Ceramic	✓		✓	✓	1/10	1.9	1.2	2200
Kambrook Steamline KI730	30	67	67	67	Non-stick	✓		✓	✓	na	2.5	1.0	2000
Kambrook Speedsteam KI480	50	63	60	71	Non-stick	✓	✓	✓	✓	0.5/8	2.5	1.0	2000
• **Electrolux** Ultrasteam 400 ESI750S	129	61	57	69	Metallic	✓	✓	✓	✓	0.5/8	3.0	1.5	2400
• **Homemaker** 2000W KB-166A2	14	61	57	69	Non-stick	✓				na	1.9	0.9	2000
• **Tefal** Freemove Cordless FV9920	160	56	50	71	Autoclean Catalys	✓	✓	✓		0.5/8	1.9	1.3	2400

Steam stations

Steam stations generate a lot of steam so you can effortlessly iron out the wrinkles in your clothes. As they grow in popularity we're seeing more and more manufacturers make their debut onto the market, with Kambrook and Sunbeam the newcomers in this round of testing.

We subject steam stations to the same assessments as steam irons, and while in the past we've said they're hands-down the better performers, this isn't necessarily the case this time around. The top-scoring steam iron performs just as well as some of our recommended steam stations. The newly tested **Kambrook Steam Station Pro Steam System KSS70**, **Sunbeam Pro Glide SR8300** and **Sunbeam Pro Glide Eco SR8710** rank at the bottom of the table (page 68). The Kambrook performs well but not excellently, unlike our recommended models. The two Sunbeams are only OK performers – we found they drip water across all temperature settings.

Don't forget that with steam stations you'll also need a specific ironing board that has a stand where the steam station sits. These boards are more expensive than standard ones and take up more room.

WHAT TO BUY

95%
Laura Star Lift Model 500

Good points
- Very good controls

Bad points
- Steam hose and the power cord are fairly short
- Comparatively expensive

94%
Tefal Pro Express Total Auto Control GV8960

Good points
- Excellent controls
- Cord rewind mechanism

Bad points
- Steam hose and the power cord are fairly short
- Comparatively expensive

94%
Philips PerfectCare Aqua GC8635

Good points
- Excellent pre-adjusted soleplate temperature (one setting only)

Bad points
- Steam hose and the power cord are fairly short

93%
Philips PerfectCare Pure GC7635

Good points
- Excellent pre-adjusted soleplate temperature (one setting only)

Bad points
- Steam hose and the power cord are fairly short

Contact
philips.com.au
russellhobbs.com.au
sunbeam.com.au
breville.com.au
sunbeam.com.au
morphyrichards.com.au
philips.com.au
panasonic.com.au
philips.com.au
philips.com.au
russellhobbs.com.au
tefal.com.au
sunbeam.com.au
sunbeam.com.au
tefal.com.au
tefal.com.au
philips.com.au
kambrook.com.au
target.com.au
panasonic.com.au
kambrook.com.au
kambrook.com.au
electrolux.com.au
kmart.com.au
tefal.com.au

USING THE TABLE Price Recommended retail, as of Jan 14. **Scores** The overall score is made up of performance (70%) and ease of use (30%). **Features** See What to Look For, page 65. **TABLE NOTES** • Newly tested. **na** Not applicable. **ns** Not stated. **(A)** This model will be replaced by model number SR6851. The change is only to packaging and product colour. **(B)** This model will be replaced by model number SR6551. The change is only to packaging and product colour.

PREVIOUSLY RECOMMENDED

(*CHOICE*, Aug 12)

90% Hoover IronSpeed SRD 4107	$499
90% Russell Hobbs Steam Central RHST102	$250
88% Tefal Easy Pressing GV5245	$250

ABOUT THE REST

The **Kambrook** is the least expensive steam station on test. It has very good controls, steam lock and a short heat-up time, but it's poor at ironing linen and the steam hose and power cord are fairly short.

The **Sunbeam Pro Glide SR8300** has a short heat-up time, automatic shut-off and very good controls, but is only OK for ironing organza and linen and the steam hose and power cord are fairly short. This is much the same for the **Sunbeam Pro Glide Eco SR8710**, although it also has a long power cord and steam lock.

Garment steamers

Garment steamers are for ironing delicate fabrics such as dresses, shirts and suits, giving you a drycleaner's finish without the corresponding price tag. Since no pressure is applied to the materials, garment steamers are a gentler way of ironing and less likely to damage delicate fabrics.

We tested three models against the same tests as steam irons and steam stations as well as extra tests using poly-cotton shirts, two dresses (one polyester and the other silk) and two curtains.

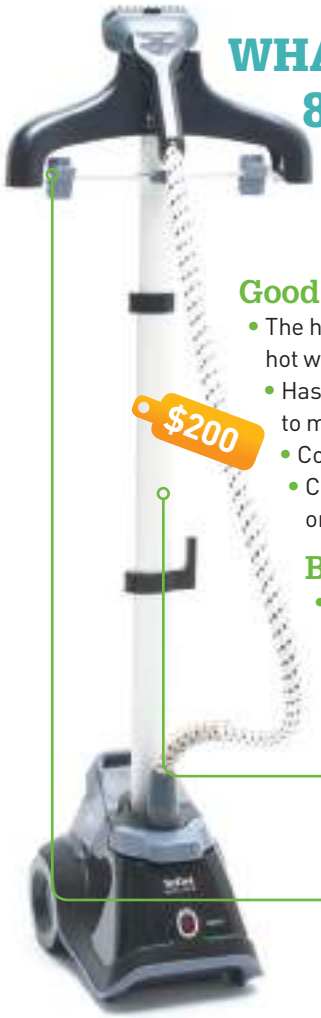
As in our previous test, all three newly tested models are recommended. The **Tefal Minute Steam IS6200** is the best overall of the lot and very easy to use. The **Conair Compact Garment Steamer CGS4A** and **Kambrook Swift Steam Garment Steamer KSS20** are compact models and perfect if you don't have a lot of space for storage – you could even pack the Kambrook in your suitcase for travelling. Bear in mind, however, that these two models have smaller water tanks and may need to be refilled more frequently. The Conair takes 700mL while the Kambrook only takes 200mL.

Steamers aren't a complete substitute for an iron or steam station, as some fabrics need these irons to remove creases effectively.

STEAM STATIONS	PERFORMANCE			FEATURES						SPECIFICATIONS				
	Price ($)	Overall score (%)	Performance score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Claimed soleplate type	Steam lock	Variable steam	Refill tank during ironing	Cord storage	Auto shut-off (min)	Cord length (m)	Hose length (m)	Weight (kg, total)	Stated wattage (W)	Contact
• **Laura Star** Lift Model 500	799	95	97	89	Aluminium		✓	✓	✓	10	1.9	2	5.5	2200	laurastar.com.au
• **Philips** PerfectCare Pure GC7635	330	93	97	84	Non-stick			✓	✓	5	1.8	1.7	3.1	2400	philips.com.au
• **Tefal** Pro Express Total Auto Control GV8960	600	94	97	87	Gliss/Glide Protect Autoclean		✓	✓	✓	8	1.8	1.8	5.9	2400	tefal.com.au
• **Philips** PerfectCare Aqua GC8635	430	94	97	86	Non-stick			✓	✓	10	1.8	1.7	4.4	2400	philips.com.au
Hoover IronSpeed SRD 4107	499	90	95	79	Non-stick			✓	✓		1.9	1.6	6.1	2100	andico.com.au
Russell Hobbs Steam Central RHST102	250	90	95	77	Non-stick	✓		✓			1.7	1.6	4.4	2250	russellhobbs.com.au
Tefal Easy Pressing GV5245	250	88	95	73	Ultragliss		✓				1.8	1.7	3.9	2320	tefal.com.au
• **Kambrook** Steam Station Pro Steam System KSS70	100	71	73	66	Non-stick	✓	✓	✓			1.7	1.7	2.4	2400	kambrook.com.au
• **Sunbeam** Pro Glide SR8300	299	70	67	76	Ceramic		✓	✓	✓	10	1.8	1.7	4.8	2400	sunbeam.com.au
• **Sunbeam** Pro Glide Eco SR8710	399	70	67	76	Teflon	✓	✓	✓	✓	15	3.0	1.9	4.7	2400	sunbeam.com.au

USING THE TABLE Scores The overall score is made up of performance (70%) and ease of use (30%). **Features** See What to Look For, page 65. **Price** Recommended retail, as of January 2014.
TABLE NOTES • Newly tested. **na** Not applicable.

WHAT TO BUY



81%
Tefal Minute Steam IS6200

Good points
- The hose doesn't get too hot with extended use
- Has wheels so it's easy to move
- Coathanger
- Can be refilled on-the-go

Bad points
- Comparatively expensive

78%
Conair Compact Garment Steamer CGS4A

Good points
- The hose doesn't get too hot with extended use

Bad points
- Can't be refilled during steaming as it's a sealed system – the pressure has to be released first
- Noisy

78%
Kambrook Swift Steam Garment Steamer KSS20

Good points
- Can be refilled on the go
- Very compact and lightweight

Bad points
- None to mention

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WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Telescopic pole These products take up a fair bit of room, but a telescopic pole helps to make them more compact for storing.
Wheels let you easily move the steamer around.
Coathanger lets you hang your garments off the steamer while steaming.
Variable steam allows you to adjust the amount of steam depending on what you're steaming. ■

PREVIOUSLY RECOMMENDED

(*CHOICE*, Aug 12)

78% Jiffy Steamer J-2000	$429
74% Philips Quick Touch GC526	$180
73% Conair Easy Care 5000 CGS28BA	$150
70% Homemaker 1500W Garment Steamer GS28-DJ	$49

GARMENT STEAMERS		PERFORMANCE			FEATURES					SPECIFICATIONS					
	Price ($)	Overall score (%)	Performance (%)	Ease of use (%)	Variable steam	Wheels	Refill during steaming	Telescopic pole	Coat hanger	Heat-up time (min:sec)	Cord length (m)	Hose length (m)	Total weight (kg)	Stated wattage (W)	Contact
• **Tefal** Minute Steam IS6200	200	81	80	84		✓	✓	✓	✓	1:00	1.9	1.5	4.4	1630	tefal.com.au
• **Conair** Compact Garment Steamer CGS4A	69	78	80	72						5:00	1.8	1.6	2.1	1200	conairaustralia.com.au
Jiffy Steamer J-2000	429	78	79	76		✓				1:00	2.0	1.6	6.7	1300	jiffysteamers.com.au
• **Kambrook** Swift Steam Garment Steamer KSS20	50	78	78	77			✓			2:00	2.5	na	0.8	1000	kambrook.com.au
Philips Quick Touch GC526	180	74	76	70	Lo / hi		✓	✓		1:15	2.0	1.5	4.0	1800	philips.com.au
Conair Easy Care 5000 CGS28BA	149	73	71	76	Lo / hi	✓		✓	✓	1:00	1.8	1.5	3.7	1500	conairaustralia.com.au
Homemaker 1500W Garment Steamer GS28-DJ	49	70	66	78		✓		✓	✓	1:00	1.8	1.5	4.7	1500	kmart.com.au

USING THE TABLE Price Recommended retail, as of Jan 14. **Scores** The overall score is made up of performance (70%) and ease of use (30%). The performance score is based on the individual scores for silk, wool, cotton, shirts, the two dresses and two curtains. So they can't be directly compared to the other two types of products. **Features** See What to Look For, above. **TABLE NOTES** • Newly tested. **na** Not applicable.

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK

Time to get fit

CHOICE member **Gareth Davies** and his family put five fitness watches through their paces

There's something cool about seeing how far you've run, or the number of hills you've cycled or laps you've swum. Ditto the satisfaction of beating the clock. The athletic Davies family (right) gave us a rundown on a few popular sports watches.

The Davies family: Liesa, daughter Miren (middle), Gareth, and younger daughters Meredith and Alys

Log on to **choice.com.au/fitnesswatches** for more details

Tom Tom Multi-Sport GPS with heart rate monitor (HRM)

This has a simple menu system, and getting started is very easy. Liesa and Gareth found it very easy to read and adjust settings while exercising, but Miren noted it doesn't show everything she expected it to. Gareth says data retrieval took a bit of work to set up as it was difficult to download a preferred file type to review the data. That said, this is comfortable to wear, lightweight and with a soft, flexible band. It covers a good range of sports activities, including indoor swimming.

Garmin Forerunner 310XT with HRM

This is the largest model on test with a good-sized screen and clear button operation. Liesa found it frustrating if you enter a building and lose GPS or are exercising indoors. It has excellent battery life and can track a triathlon but can't track indoor swimming. Gareth thought it was comfortable to wear, but Liesa found it too featured and bulky.

Magellan Switch with HRM

The screen can be can be difficult to read in motion – particularly if you normally wear reading glasses – and the buttons aren't very intuitive. It can't be used to track indoor swimming. Miren found it too complex and bulky, while Gareth argues that despite its relatively short battery life, it's a good price for a multi-sport watch that can track a triathlon.

Polar with RC3 GPS + HRM

This is a thin-profile watch that's comfortable to wear. Liesa was overwhelmed by its huge number of functions. It's fiddly to attach the micro USB to charge, and both Liesa and Gareth wondered how durable the fitting and flap over the port would be. The complex operations and busy screen make it difficult to read and use at times. It also has no swimming function, and can't track a triathlon.

Nike GPS Sports Watch with Polar Heart Rate Sensor

This also has a comparatively slimline profile, with a well laid-out screen and good battery life for a runner's-only watch. Gareth found it a bit tricky to find the right type of file to review data, and had some concern over the durability of the USB tab in the wrist strap.

Tom Tom Multi-Sport GPS with HRM ($314.85)

Garmin Forerunner 310XT with HRM ($329.95)

Magellan Switch with HRM ($199)

Polar with RC3 GPS + HRM ($294)

Nike GPS Sports Watch with Polar Heart Rate Sensor ($272.85)

The verdict

The Tom Tom is the clear favourite, whether for multi- or single-sport use. For the serious triathlete, the Garmin can track outdoor swims, and has the longest battery life. Gareth suggests listing the training and competition activities you plan to do, and match the watches' capabilities against them. ■

MARTHA PSIROUKIS

Dry hard

Martha Psiroukis finds your ideal clothes dryer

In the market for a new dryer? Now may be the time to consider a heat pump type over a condenser or even a vented model. Heat pumps, a type of condenser dryer that recycles hot, dehumidified air for further use in the drying cycle instead of venting it, now have slightly increased efficiency, along with a lower purchase price – and there are more of them. They still cost a lot more to buy, but you can recoup your initial outlay in running cost savings in a shorter timeframe compared with other condensers. Their downside is long drying times – some take well over three hours to dry a full load.

Which is right for you?

Sunny backyard

If you're on a tight budget, have access to the sun's drying energy, and a dryer is only for rainy weeks, then a well-priced vented dryer is still a cost-effective option.

Apartment living

If you need to use a dryer often and ducting isn't an option, an efficient heat pump dryer is ideal. You can recoup the purchase cost within two to four years compared with an expensive or inefficient condenser.

Green conscious

If reducing your environmental impact is inportant to you, a gas dryer or a heat pump dryer is your best choice.

Time is of the essence

If you need really fast drying times, you can't go past the gas-powered Rinnai. But if gas isn't an option for you, check our table (page 72) to find those with the best drying time scores.

WHAT TO BUY

The Best Buys are the least expensive to buy and run within each category. Our Green Buy Rinnai gas dryer is the best option for reducing CO_2 emissions and is comparatively cheap to run, but expensive to buy and install.

LESS THAN 5KG ELECTRIC VENTED

Simpson 39P400M (Apr 08) $469

5-7KG ELECTRIC VENTED

Ariston AS600VX (May 08) $899

Simpson 39S600M (Apr 09) $679

Simpson 39S500M (Apr 08) $619

Bosch WTV74100AU (A) (May 10) $899

6KG+ CONDENSERS

Asko T754C (May 13) $1599

Asko T784C (May 13) $1799

Miele T7944C Honeycomb (Jun 12) $1599

6KG+ CONDENSER HEAT PUMP DRYER

Bosch WTW84360AU (May 13) (A) $2499

GAS

Rinnai Dry-Soft 6 $1999

THE SUN / NATURAL CONVECTION

A clothes line / rack $50+

6-8KG CONDENSER

70%

Bosch WTC84101AU

Good points

- Very good ease of use
- Has sensor and timer drying
- Can be stacked (kit purchased separately)

Bad points

- No drying rack supplied
- No time-to-go display

6KG+ CONDENSER HEAT PUMP

80%

Miele T8861WP

Good points

- Very good energy efficiency
- Excellent ease of use
- Has sensor and timer drying
- Can be stacked (kit purchased separately)

Bad points

- No drying rack supplied

IMAGE: SHUTTERSTOCK | (A) DISCONTINUED BY MAY 2014. MONTH AND YEAR REFERS TO ISSUE OF CHOICE IN WHICH MODEL WAS FIRST PROFILED.

WHAT TO BUY
6KG+ CONDENSER HEAT PUMP (CONT'D)

78%
Bosch WTY88700AU
Good points
- Excellent energy efficiency
- Relatively low running costs
- Very good ease of use
- Has sensor and timer drying
- Can be stacked (kit purchased separately)

Bad points
- Relatively long drying time
- No drying rack supplied

77%
Asko T754HP W
Good points
- Excellent energy efficiency
- Relatively low running costs
- Excellent ease of use
- Has sensor and timer drying
- Can be stacked (Asko washing machines only)

Bad points
- Relatively long drying time
- No drying rack supplied

77%
Electrolux EDH3284PDW
Good points
- Very good energy efficiency
- Very good ease of use
- Has sensor and timer drying
- Can be stacked (kit purchased separately)

Bad points
- No drying rack supplied

73%
Miele T8929WP
Good points
- Very good energy efficiency
- Excellent ease of use
- Has sensor and timer drying
- Can be stacked (kit purchased separately)

Bad points
- No drying rack supplied

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	COSTS			PERFORMANCE			
	Price ($)	Running costs ($/10 years)	Cost per kg (c)	Overall score (%)	Energy efficiency (%)	Drying time (%)	Ease of use (%)
<5KG ELECTRIC VENTED DRYERS							
Simpson 39P400M	469	1323	22	71	63	67	93
Fisher & Paykel DE40F56A	369	1870	31	54	43	47	88
5-7KG ELECTRIC VENTED DRYERS							
Ariston AS600VX	899	1868	21	73	66	72	88
Simpson 39S600M	679	1853	21	73	66	70	93
Simpson 39S500M	619	1604	21	72	64	69	93
Bosch WTV74100AU (A)	899	2174	21	71	66	69	87
Electrolux EDV605 (A)	739	2108	23	67	60	64	85
Electrolux EDV505 (A)	679	1745	23	67	60	64	85
Whirlpool AWD60A	499	2057	23	67	61	61	92
Fisher & Paykel DE50F56E1	439	1735	23	66	61	60	87
Whirlpool SDRY60	619	2163	24	64	59	59	85
Fisher & Paykel DE50F56A	529	1872	25	63	57	57	85
Haier HDY-60M	299	2673	30	58	47	53	88
6-8KG CONDENSER DRYERS							
Asko T754C	1599	2121	22	70	64	67	90
Asko T784C	1799	2165	22	70	63	66	90
• **Bosch** WTC84101AU	1179	1919	21	70	64	68	87
Miele T7944C	1599	2162	21	70	66	68	83
• **Haier** HD80-01	869	2616	22	69	63	65	87
Bosch WTE84101AU (A)	1499	2354	22	68	62	66	85
AEG T76280AC	1649	2839	24	67	59	64	87
• **Electrolux** EDP2074PDW	1059	2447	23	67	60	63	87
• **Hoover** DYC8713BX-AUS	1099	2640	25	63	56	58	87
6-8KG CONDENSER HEAT-PUMP DRYERS							
• **Miele** T8861WP	2599	1180	10	80	89	66	90
Bosch WTW84360AU (A)	2499	783	9	79	91	64	87
• **Bosch** WTY88700AU	2729	788	8	78	94	58	87
• **Asko** T754HP W	1999	991	9	77	90	58	90
• **Electrolux** EDH3284PDW	2219	1277	11	77	87	61	87
• **Miele** T8929WP	3199	1255	12	73	84	63	90
GAS DRYERS							
Rinnai Dry-Soft 6	1999	804	9	71	53	80	88

USING THE TABLE Scores The overall score is made up of energy efficiency (40%), drying time (40%) and ease of based on drying a full load about three times a week (150 times a year) for 10 years and is calculated based on electricity

For details on how we test dryers, as well as what to look for, log on to **choice.com.au/dryers** For results of our latest reliability survey, go to **choice.com.au/appliancereliability**

			FEATURES					SPECIFICATIONS					
Cycle time (min)	Noise (dB)	Energy used per load (kWh)	Controls	Reverse tumbling	Drying rack	Wall-mountable / stackable	Unit starts on door shut	Air exhaust (vent) location	Ducting kit	Filter location	Capacity (kg)	Dimensions (cm, W x H x D)	Contact
103	54	3.39	Timer	✓		✓/✓		Front (rear optional)	Optional	Inside front	4	60 x 80 x 51	simpson.com.au
175	55	4.80	Timer			✓/-	✓	Front	Optional	Door	4	57 x 81 x 44	fp.com.au
128	55	4.79	Sensor & timer	✓		✓/-		Rear	Supplied	Inside front	6	60 x 83 x 56	aristonchannel.com
139	57	4.75	Timer	✓		✓/✓		Front or rear	Optional	Inside front	6	61 x 80 x 62	simpson.com.au
122	54	4.11	Timer	✓		✓/✓		Front (rear optional)	Optional	Inside front	5	60 x 80 x 55	simpson.com.au
169	54	5.57	Sensor & timer			-/✓		Rear or left side	Supplied	Inside front	7	60 x 85 x 60	bosch-home.com.au
174	57	5.40	Sensor & timer	✓		✓/✓		Front or rear	Optional	Inside front	6	60 x 80 x 60	electrolux.com.au
145	57	4.48	Sensor & timer	✓		✓/✓		Front or rear	Optional	Inside front	5	60 x 80 x 57	electrolux.com.au
189	52	5.28	Timer		✓	✓/-		Front door	na	Door	6	60 x 83 x 56	whirlpool.com.au
161	55	4.45	Sensor	✓	✓	✓/-		Front or rear	Optional	Inside front	5	57 x 81 x 56	fp.com.au
197	60	5.55	Sensor & timer	✓		✓/✓		Front or rear	Supplied	Inside front	6	57 x 81 x 56	whirlpool.com.au
175	55	4.80	Timer	✓		✓/-	✓	Front or rear	Optional	Inside front	5	57 x 81 x 56	fp.com.au
229	55	6.85	Timer	✓	✓	✓/-		Front	Optional	Door	6	60 x 85 x 62	haierlife.com.au
169	59	5.44	Sensor & timer	✓		-/✓		Rear	na	On door	6.5	60 x 85 x 59	asko.com.au
174	59	5.55	Sensor & timer	✓		-/✓		Rear	na	On door	6.5	60 x 85 x 59	asko.com.au
148	58	4.92	Sensor & timer			-/✓		Front or rear	na	Inside front	6	85 x 60 x 60	bosch-home.com.au
174	52	5.54	Sensor	✓		-/✓		Front	na	Inside front, door	7	60 x 85 x 63	miele.com.au
220	58	6.71	Sensor & timer	ns		-/✓		Front	na	Inside front	8	85 x 60 x 62	haier.com.au
187	56	6.04	Sensor & timer			-/✓		Rear	na	Inside front	7	60 x 85 x 60	bosch-home.com.au
229	54	7.28	Sensor & timer	✓		-/✓		Front	na	Inside front	8	60 x 85 x 60	aeg-electrolux.com.au
208	56	6.27	Sensor & timer	✓		-/✓		Front	na	Inside front	7	85 x 60 x 54	electrolux.com.au
237	58	6.77	Sensor & timer	✓		-/✓		Front or rear	na	Inside front	7	85 x 60 x 60	andico.com.au/hoover
215	52	3.02	Sensor & timer	✓	✓	-/✓		Front	na	Inside front, door	8	85 x 60 x 60	miele.com.au
172	55	2.01	Sensor & timer			-/✓		Rear	na	Inside front	6	60 x 85 x 60	bosch-home.com.au
236	53	2.02	Sensor & timer			-/✓		Front or rear	na	Inside front	7	85 x 60 x 60	bosch-home.com.au
240	57	2.54	Sensor & timer	✓		-/✓		Front	na	On door	7	85 x 60 x 59	asko.com.au
252	51	3.27	Sensor & timer	✓		-/✓		Front	na	Inside front	8	85 x 60 x 60	electrolux.com.au
209	53	3.22	Sensor & timer	✓	✓	-/✓		Front	na	Inside front, door	7	85 x 60 x 60	miele.com.au
88	59	6.15	Sensor & timer			✓/✓		Top panel	Supplied	Inside rear	6	65 x 69 x 53	rinnai.com.au

use (20%). The energy-efficiency score takes into account only the energy used at the point of connection in your home; if production of energy were included, gas dryers would score significantly higher. **Running costs** This is at 26c/kWh and gas at 1.6588c/MJ (equivalent to 6c/kWh). **Price** Recommended retail, as of Feb 14 . **TABLE NOTES** • Newly tested. **na** Not applicable. **ns** Not stated. **(A)** To be discontinued by May 2014.

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Compiled by Siobahn Donohoe

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Take Away Menu
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11 am - 10 pm
B.Y.O. Hong Kong Chef
B.Y.O. Hong Kong Chef

JOCKEYING FOR POSITION

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FIT FOR NOTHING

A skimboard that you can't actually use as a skimboard. What will they think of next?

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